MY
STUDY
FIRE
BY
HAMILTON
·W·
MABIE

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MY STUDY FIRE · By

HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE

WITH SIXTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY MAUDE ALICE & GENEVIEVE COWLES

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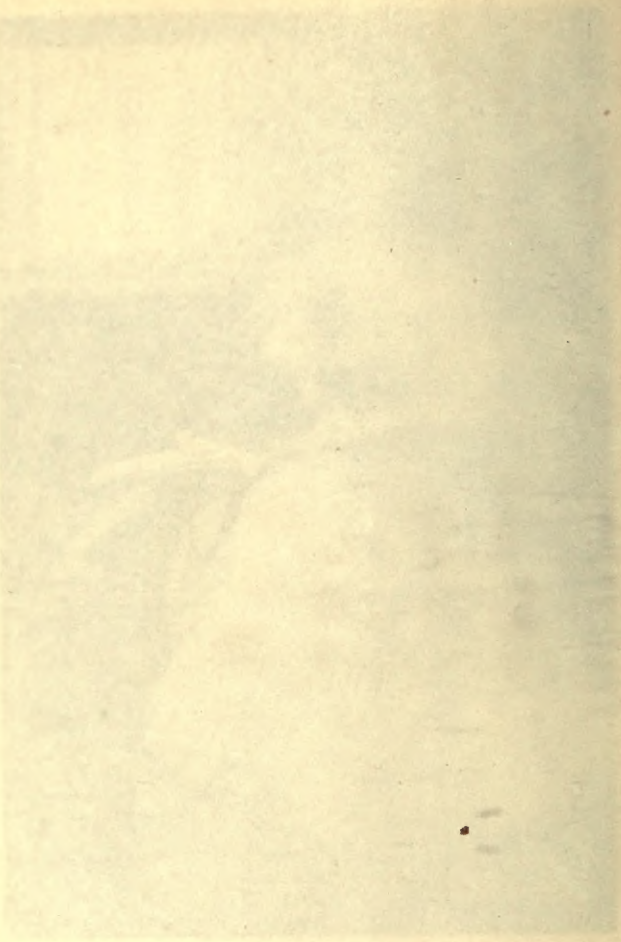
NEW YORK · PUBLISHED BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY · MDCCCXCI

Tanglewood Tales



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TO

J. T. M.

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My Study Fire

CHAPTER I

THE FIRE LIGHTED

THE lighting of the fire in my study is an event of importance in the calendar of the domestic year; it marks the close of one season, and announces the advent of another. There is always a touch of pathos in the last warm autumnal days, that makes the cordial acceptance of winter a kind of infidelity to the months that have lavished their gifts of life and beauty at our threshold. I am quite willing to shiver at my writing-table on sharp autumnal mornings in order that the final act of separation from summer may be postponed a little. This year we have been more than ever reluctant to sever the last tie with a season which has be-

friended us as none of its predecessors has ever done, and it was not until a keen northwester shook the house yesterday that we prepared the hearth for its annual fire. The day broke cold and gray, with an unmistakable aspect of winter in the sky and upon the fields; the little landlocked harbour looked bleak and desolate, and the wide expanse of water beyond was dark, cold, and threatening. I found my study cheerless and unfamiliar; it was deserted by one season, and the next had not yet taken possession of it. It was a barren day; thought and feeling were both congealed, and refused to flow, and even the faithful pen, that has patiently traversed so many sheets of blank paper, stumbled and halted. After a fruitless struggle with myself and my environment, I yielded to the general depression and closed my portfolio. A long walk brought me into harmony with nature, and

when I returned I was not sorry to see that the andirons had been heaped with wood in my absence, and all things made ready for lighting the fire.

We lingered long at the dinner-table that evening, and when we left it a common impulse seemed to lead us into the study. Rosalind always lights the fire, and one of the pleasant impressions of the annual ceremonial is the glow of the first blaze upon her fair face and waving hair. Two little heads mingled their wealth of golden tresses at one end of the rug, intent upon the quick, mysterious contagion of flame which never fails to fill them with wonder; while in the background I watched the picture, so soon to take on a new and subtle beauty, with curiously mixed regret and anticipation. I take out my watch in unconscious recognition of the importance of an event which marks the autumnal equinox in the household calendar. At the same moment a little puff of smoke announces that the momentous act has been performed; all eyes are fixed on the fireplace, and every swift advance of flame, creeping silently from stick to stick until

the whole mass is wrapped in fire, is noted with deepening satisfaction. A genial warmth begins to pervade the room, and the soft glow falls first on the little group, and then passes on to touch the pictures and the rows of books with its luminous and transfiguring cheer. I am suddenly conscious that a new spirit has taken possession of the room, liberated no doubt by the curling flames that are now singing among the sticks, and hinting that it is winter, after all, which forces from summer her last and rarest charm, her deepest and most spiritual truth. That which has vanished to the eye lives in the thought, and takes on its most elusive and yet its most abiding beauty.

This first lighting of the fire in my study is, indeed, a brief transfiguration of life; it discloses to me anew the very soul of nature, it reveals the thought that runs through literature, it discovers the heart of my hope and aspiration. I catch in this transient splendour a vision of the deepest meaning which life and art have for me. The glow rests first upon those faces, eagerly searching the depths of the

The glow rests first upon those faces eagerly searching the depths of the fire.

fire, that are the very heart of my heart; it rests next upon the books in which the thoughts of the great teachers and the dreams of the great artists remain indestructible; it steals last through the windows, and, even in the night, seems to bathe the far-reaching landscape in a passing glory. Like the spirit which Faust summoned into his study, it reveals to me

> "A weaving, flowing
> Life, all glowing."

After a time the golden heads begin to nod, and the dreams which they have seen in the glowing coals and the dancing flames begin to mingle with the dreams which sleep weaves with such careless, audacious fingers over the unconscious hours. The good-nights are soon said, and the little feet, already overtaken with drowsiness, make uncertain sounds on the stairs as they take up their journey to slumberland. Rosalind returns in a moment, and draws her easy-chair before the fire, with some fragile apology for occupation in her hands. The lamp has not been lighted, and neither of us seems

to note the absence of its friendly flame. The book that we have been reading aloud by turns lies unopened, and the stream of talk that generally touches the events of the day in little eddies and then flows on to deeper themes is lost in a silence which neither is willing to break, because it is so much fuller of meaning than any words could be. Like the ancient river of Elis, thought flows on underground, and is perhaps all the deeper and sweeter because it does not flash into speech.

For a long time I do nothing but dream, and dreams are by no means unprofitable to those whose waking hours are given to honest work; dreams are not without meaning, for they are combined of memory and prophecy so subtly that no chemistry of philosophy has yet been able to separate them into their component parts. In his dreams a thoughtful man sees both his past and his future pass before him in the order of their real sequence; there are the memories, not so much of his acts as of the purposes that were behind them, and there are the aspirations and hopes with which he unconsciously fills the years

to come. A bad man cannot face an open fire with comfort, and he must be a man of rare fidelity of purpose and achievement to whom its searching light does not bring some revelations of himself which he would rather have hidden under the ashes of the past.

While I was meditating on the moral uses of a fire on the hearth, Rosalind put on a fresh stick, and stirred the half-burned wood with an energy that raised a little shower of sparks. The tongues of flame began to circle about the hickory, eager, apparently, to find the responsive glow sleeping in its sound and reticent heart. I recalled the strip of woodland from which it was cut, and like a vision I saw once more the summer skies and heard the summer birds. The seasons are so linked together in the procession of the year that they are never out of sight of each other. Even now, as I step to the window, and look upon the bleak landscape under the cold light of the wintry stars, I see just beyond the retreating splendour of autumn; I hear at intervals the choirs of summer chanting to the sun their endless adoration;

and from the front of the column, almost lost to sight, come whiffs of that delicate fragrance which escaped when spring broke the alabaster box and poured out the treasures of the year. Each season has lavished its wealth on me, and each has awakened its kindred moods and stirred its kindred thoughts within me. I am conscious, as I look into the bed of glowing coals to which the fire has sunk, that I am even now undergoing the subtle process of change from season to season. The habits, the moods, the impressions, which summer created in me have gone, and new aptitudes, thoughts, and emotions have taken their place. The world through which I have wandered with vagrant feet these past months, intent only to keep a heart open to every voice from field and wood and sky, has sunk below the horizon, and another and different world has risen into view. Pan pipes no more, while Orion blazes overhead and leads the glittering constellations. Thought, that has played truant through the long days, forgetting books and men in its chase after beauty and its stealthy ambuscade of the hermit-

thrush in the forest, returns once more to brood over the problems of its own being, and to search for the truth that lies at the bottom of the wells that men have dug along the route of history for the refreshment of the race.

The glow of the dying fire no longer reaches the windows; the world beyond is left undisturbed to night and darkness; but it still sends flickering gleams along the rows of books, and lights up their dusky titles. These are the true companions of the short wintry days and the long wintry nights. To find the life that is in them, to read with clear eyes whatever of truth they contain, to see face to face the deep human experiences out of which they grew — these are the tasks to which the season leads us. In summer the

senses wander abroad, and thought keeps company with them, hand in hand with nature, eager to see, to hear, and to feel; in winter the wanderers return to the fire, to recall and meditate upon the scenes in which they have mingled, and of which they themselves have been a part.

Rosalind gives the fire another stirring, and the last latent flame flashes up and falls upon that ancient handbook of life and toil, Hesiod's "Works and Days." How happily the old Greek ensnared the year, with all its hours and tasks, in that well-worn title! We, too, shall share with him the toils and pleasures of the seasons. We have had our Days; our Works await us.

CHAPTER II

NATURE AND CHILDHOOD

S it not due to November that some discreet person should revise what the poets have said about it? For one, I have felt no slight sense of shame as I opened to the melancholy lines full of the wail of winds and the sob of rain, while a brilliant autumnal light has flooded the world. The days have passed in a stately procession, under skies so cloudless and serene and with such amplitude of golden light that I have sometimes thought I saw a little disdain of the accessories of the earlier season. It has seemed as if November, radiant and sunlit, needed no soft fleecy clouds, no budding flowers, no rich and rustling foliage, to complete her charm. Even the splendid tradition of October has not overawed its maligned

successor, and of the oft-repeated slanders of the poets no notice has been taken save perhaps to cast a more brilliant light upon their graves. It is certainly high time that the traditional November should give place to the actual November — month of prolonged and golden light, with just enough of cloud and shadow to heighten by contrast the brilliancy of the sunshine. The border-land between winter and summer is certainly the most beautiful and alluring part of the year. The late spring and the late autumn months hold in equipoise the charms of both seasons. Their characteristics are less pronounced and more subtle; and they are for that reason richer in suggestiveness and more alluring to the imagination.

I have watched the flight of the autumnal days from my study windows as one watches the distant passage of the birds southward. They have carried the last memories of summer with them, but with what grace and majesty they have retreated before an invisible foe! With slow and noiseless step, pausing for days together in soft, unbroken dreams, they have passed

beyond the horizon line and left me under a spell so deep that I have hardly yet shaken it off and turned to other sights and thoughts. One of the great concerns of life is this silent, unbroken procession of the seasons, rising from the deeps of time like dreams sent to touch our mortal life with more than mortal beauty. Stars, tides, flowers, foliage, birds, clouds, snows, and storms — how marvellous is the frame in which they appear and disappear about us; as real as ourselves, and yet as fleeting and elusive as our dreams!

Rosalind and I have often talked about these things as they appear to children, and we are agreed that nature is a good deal nearer and more intelligible to childhood than most people think. Children of sensitive and imaginative temper have marvellous capacity for receiving impressions: they absorb as unconsciously to themselves as to others. When they seem most indifferent or preoccupied, they are often most impressionable. Unperceived by those who are nearest them, unrecognised at the moment by themselves, there often press upon the mind of a child the

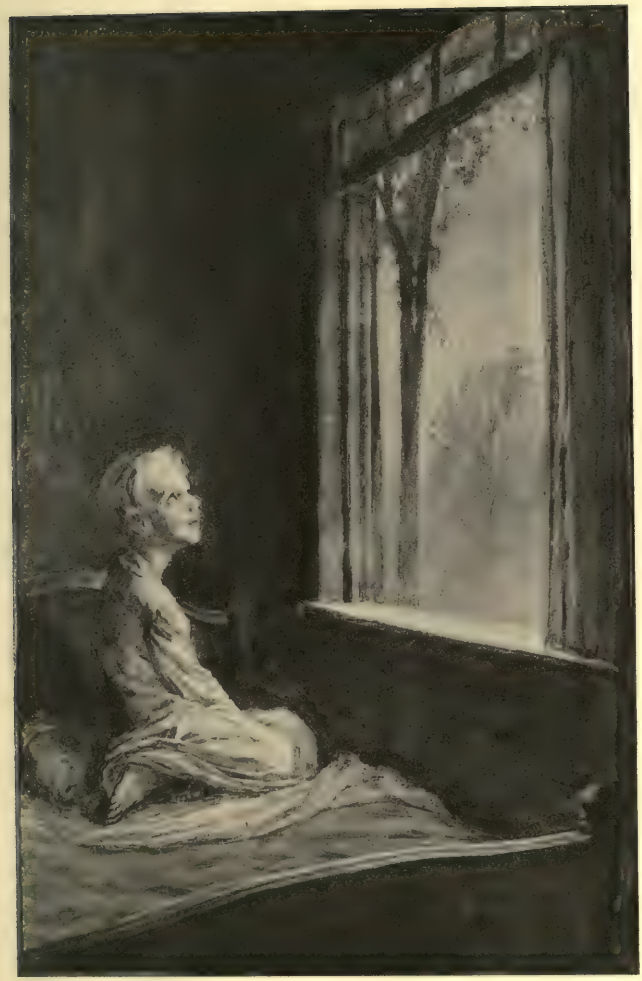
deepest and most awful mysteries of life; mysteries that lie far below the plummet of thought. It is only as one thinks back and recalls out of memory those marvellous moments when every visible thing seemed suddenly smitten with unreality in the presence of some great spiritual truth, felt but uncomprehended, that one realises the depth and richness of the unspoken thoughts of children. In a passage of great beauty De Quincey has described the feelings that came when as a boy he stood beside the form of his dead sister. "There lay the sweet childish figure; there the angel face; and, as people usually fancy, it was said in the house that not one feature had suffered any change. Had they not? The forehead, indeed — the serene and noble forehead — *that* might be the same; but the frozen eyelids, the darkness that seemed to steal from beneath them, the marble lips, the stiffening hands, laid palm to palm, as if repeating the supplications of closing anguish — could these be mistaken for life? Had it been so, wherefore did I not spring to those heavenly lips with tears and never ending

kisses? But so it was *not*. I stood checked for a moment; awe, not fear, fell upon me; and whilst I stood, a solemn wind began to blow — the saddest that ear ever heard. It was a wind that might have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand centuries. Many times since, upon summer days, when the sun is about the hottest, I have remarked the same wind arising and uttering the same hollow, solemn Memnonian but saintly swell; it is in this world the one great *audible* symbol of eternity." That wind, more real than any that ever blew over earthly fields, was heard by no one but the imaginative child standing, to all appearance, silent and spellbound beside his sister's form.

Not long ago Rosalind was looking through Goethe's "Autobiography" to recall what the German boy of six years thought of the terrible earthquake at Lisbon in 1755, when she happened upon another very interesting and significant passage in child life. The boy Goethe had heard much of the discussion about religious matters which was warm in those days, and invaded even the quiet and

somewhat dry atmosphere of his father's house. He gave no sign, but these things sank into his heart, and finally there came to him the great thought that he too might personally approach the invisible God of nature. "The God who stands in immediate connection with nature, and owns and loves it as his work, seemed to him the proper God, who might be brought into closer relationship with man, as with everything else, and who would take care of him as of the motion of the stars, the days and seasons, the animals and plants. The boy could ascribe no form to this Being; he therefore sought him in his works, and would, in the good Old Testament fashion, build him an altar." To accomplish this deep and secret purpose he took a lacquered music-stand and ornamented it according to his own idea of symbolism. This done, and the fumigating pastils arranged, the young priest awaited the rising of the sun. When the red light lay bright along the edges of the roofs, he held a burning-glass above the pastils, ignited them, and so obtained both the flame and the fragrance necessary

"My little heart beat fast and faster"



to his worship. Does not this strange, secret act in a child's life parallel and explain some of the earliest experiences of the most primitive races?

A beautiful and prophetic story is told of William Henry Channing by his latest biographer. He was a singularly noble boy; graceful in figure, charming in manner, expressive in countenance, sensitive, responsive, and imaginative. One night after he had fallen asleep he was suddenly awakened by a noise, and, looking out of the window, he saw a splendid star shining full upon him. "It fascinated my gaze," he writes, "till it became like an angel's eye. It seemed to burn in and penetrate to my inmost being. My little heart beat fast and faster, till I could bear the intolerable blaze no more. And, hearing the steps of some servant in the passage, I sprang from my crib, ran swiftly to the door, and, in my long nightgown, with bare, noiseless feet, followed down the stairway to the lower hall. . . . The footman flung open the drawing-room door, and a flood of light, with a peal of laughter, burst forth, and in the midst

some voice cried out, 'What is that in white behind you?' The servant had, affrighted, turned and drawn aside. Instantly from the brilliant circle stepped forth my mother, and, folding me in her bosom, said soothingly, 'What troubles my boy?' All I could do was to fling my arms about her neck and whisper: 'Oh, mamma! The star! the star! I could not bear the star!'"

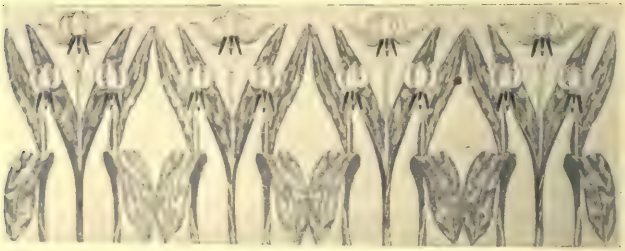
There is a famous description of a kindred experience in one of those poems of Wordsworth's which have become part of the memory of all lovers of nature. It was the first poem I ever heard Emerson read, and the strange, penetrating sweetness of that voice, so spiritual in its tone, so full of interpretation in its accent, is for me part of the verse itself:

"There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
And islands of Winander! — many a time
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth

Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him. And they would
shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud,
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
Of mirth and jocund din! And, when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake."

The wonderful experience, described in these lines with the inimitable simplicity of nature itself, marks an epoch in a child's life; it is as if a door were suddenly left ajar into some world unseen before. "Never shall I forget that inward occurrence, till now narrated to no mortal," says Richter, "wherein I witnessed the birth of my self-consciousness, of which I can still give the time and place. One fore-

noon I was standing, a very young child, in the outer door, and looking leftward at the stack of the fuel-wood, when all at once the internal vision, 'I am a me' (*Ich bin ein Ich*), came like a flash from heaven before me, and in gleaming light ever afterward continued." The incommunicable world of childhood, through which we have all walked, but which lies hidden from us now by a golden mist — was it not the poetic prelude of life, wherein the deepest things were seen at times in clear vision, and the sublimest mysteries appealed to us with a strange familiarity! To imaginative childhood, is not the cycle of the changing seasons what it was to the German boy in the narrow and straitened country parsonage, an idyl-year? And is there not for every child of kindred soul "an idyl-kingdom and pastoral world in a little hamlet and parsonage"?



"Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls"

The short December afternoon was already fading in a clear white light on the low hills.

CHAPTER III

THE ANSWER OF LIFE

THE short December afternoon was already fading in a clear white light on the low hills, and the shadows were creeping stealthily from point to point, alert to seize every advantage and follow the retreating steps of day without break or pause. It was that most delightful of all hours, when work is done and the active enjoyment or companionship of the evening has not begun. Rosalind had come in from a long walk with a charming air of vigor and vitality, which seemed to impart itself to the whole room. She gave the fire an energetic stirring, which brought its glow to a focus and kindled its latent flame into a sudden and fiery splendour.

Then she drew up a low ottoman, and sat down to enjoy the cheer and warmth which she had evoked. It was not the first time that something which had smoldered in my hands had caught life and beauty in hers. I was in a sombre mood. I had spent the morning, and, for that matter, a good many mornings, re-reading the Greek plays, and striving by a patient and persistent use of the imagination to possess myself of the secret of those masterly and immortal creations. To me they had long ceased to be dead, and to-day especially they were more vital and palpable than anything that I saw in the world around me. I had finished again that splendid trilogy in which Æschylus unfolds the doom of the house of Atreus. I had seen the flashing fires which lighted Agamemnon home to his death; I had heard Cassandra's awful monody; I had heard, too, that appalling cry which seemed to run through the world like the shudder of a doomed soul when the great leader fell in his own palace; I had witnessed the vengeance of the offended gods through the hands of Orestes; and I had followed

the Fury-haunted steps of the unwilling executioner of the eternal law from the temple at Delphi to the judgment seat at Athens. All these things were still in my memory, and the room had caught a solemn and awful quietude in the overshadowing presence of these vast and terrible representations of antique life.

Rosalind's coming broke the spell of memories that pressed too heavily on heart and mind; she seemed to reunite me with the movement of present life, and to lead me out of the subterranean depths where the springs of the great drama of history are concealed, to the sunlight and bloom of the upper world. In her I suddenly found the key to the mystery which I had sought in vain to solve by process of thought, for in her I saw the harmony of law with beauty and joy, the rounded circle of right action, and a temperament akin with light and song and the sweetness of nature.

"You are thinking," she said at last, as she turned toward me, as if to carry further a line of thought which she seized by the mingled intuition of long affection and

intimate fellowship — "you are thinking that — "

"I was thinking that you are often a better answer to my questions than I can ever hope to frame for myself. I was thinking that the deepest mysteries of life are explained, and the deepest problems of life are solved, not by thinking but by living. When I see a man who has broken a fundamental law, and by patience, penitence, and labour has regained the harmony which he lost, I no longer sorrow that Æschylus's 'Prometheus Bound' is a fragment. I see before me in actual realisation the solution which the dramatist undoubtedly presented in the two plays of the Trilogy which are lost. Genius can do much, but even genius falls short of the actuality of a single human life. I have been among my books all day, and they have confused and overpowered me with doubts and questions which start in books but are rarely answered there; you have come in, fresh, buoyant, and full of hope, from contact with life, where these questions find their answers if we are only willing to keep an open mind and heart."

"But don't you think," Rosalind interrupted, "that the problems of living are more dramatically and clearly stated in books than in the lives of the men and women we know in this village?"

"Yes," I said, holding a newspaper before my face to shield it from the glow of the ambitious fire; "yes, more dramatically stated, because all the irrelevant details are omitted. There is the material for a drama in the career of almost every person whom we know, but the movement is overlaid and concealed by all kinds of trivial matter. A dramatist would seize the dramatic movement and bring it into clear view by casting all this

aside. He would disentangle the thread from the confused web into which every life runs to a casual observer. The problems are more clearly stated in books than in life, but they are not so clearly answered."

Here the children rushed in with some request, which they whispered in solemn secrecy to their common confidant, and then, receiving the answer they hoped for, rushed out again. It was a detached segment of life which they brought in and took out of the study in such eager haste. I knew neither the cause of the glow on their cheeks, nor of the light in their eyes, nor of the deep mystery which surrounded them as with an atmosphere.

"There is more to be learned from those children concerning the mysteries of life," I said, after they had gone, "than from any book which it has ever been my fortune to happen upon. The mysteries which perplex me are not so much in the appearance of things, and in their definite relations, as in the processes through which we are all passing. I have always had a secret sympathy with those old Oriental

religions which deified the processes of nature — the births and deaths and growth of things. The festivals which greeted the return of spring, with overflowing life in its train, and the sad processionals which lamented the departure of summer and the incoming of death, had a large element of reality in them. They appeal to me more than the worship of the serene gods whose faces and forms are so perfectly defined in art.

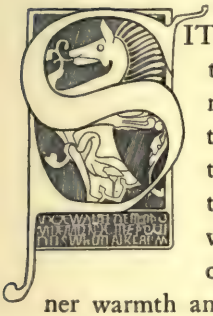
"I do not believe," I added, laying down the newspaper and stirring the fire for the sake of the glow on the deepening shadows in the room — "I do not believe that the deeper problems of living ever can be answered by the processes of thought. I believe that life itself teaches us either patience with regard to them, or reveals to us possible solutions when our hearts are pressed close against duties and sorrows and experiences of all kinds. I believe that in the thought and feelings and sufferings of children, for instance, an observer will often catch, as in a flash of revelation, some fruitful suggestion of his own relation to the universe, some far-reaching analogy

of the processes of his own growth. This wisdom of experience, which often ripens even in untrained minds into a kind of clairvoyant vision, is the deepest wisdom after all, and books are only valuable and enduring as they include and express it."

I was just about to illustrate by saying that for this reason "The Imitation of Christ" has survived all the great volumes of learning and philosophy of its age, when the bell rang, and a visitor robbed me of my audience.

CHAPTER IV

A POET'S CROWN OF SORROW



SITTING here at my writing-table loaded with magazines, reviews, and recent books, the fire burning cheerily on the hearth, Rosalind meditatively plying her needle, and wind and rain without increasing by contrast the inner warmth and brightness, it is not easy to realise the pathos of life as one reads it in poetry, nor to enter into its mystery of suffering as it has pressed heavily upon some of the greatest poets. The fountains of joy and sorrow are for the most part locked up in ourselves, but there are always those against whom, by some mysterious conjunction of the stars, calamity and disaster are written in a lifelong sentence. It is the lot of all superior natures to suffer as a part of their training and as the

price of their gifts; but this suffering has often no thorn of outward loss thrust into its sensitive heart. There are those, however, on whose careers shadows from within and from without meet in a common darkness and complete that slow anguish of soul by which a personal agony is sometimes transmuted into a universal consolation and strength. The anguish of the cross has always been the prelude to the psalms of deliverance, and the world has made no new conquest of truth and life except through those who have trodden the *via dolorosa*.

I am quite sure that these thoughts are in the mind, or rather in the heart, of Rosalind, for she drops her work at intervals and looks into the fire with the intentness of gaze of one who sees something which she does not understand. I am not blind to the vision which lies before her and fills her with doubt and uncertainty. It is the little town of Tous which the fire pictures before her, its white roofs glistening in the light of the Persian summer day. But it is not the beauty of the Oriental city which holds her gaze, it is

Began the evening by reading aloud.

the funeral train of a dead poet passing through the western gate while the reward of his immortal work, long withheld by an ignoble king, is borne into the deserted streets by the slow-moving camels. Surely the irony of what men call destiny was never more strikingly illustrated than in the story of Firdousi, the great epic poet who sang for Persia as Homer sang for Greece. Rosalind, who always wants to know a man of genius on the side of his misfortunes or his heart history, began the evening by reading aloud Mr. Gosse's picturesque "Firdousi in Exile," a poem of pleasant descriptive quality, but lacking that undertone of pathos which the story ought to have carried with it. Such a story puts one in a silent mood, and in the lull of conversation I have read to myself Mr. Arnold's fine rendering of the famous episode of "Sohrab and Rustem" from the "Epic of Kings"; a noble piece of English blank verse, from which I cannot forbear quoting a well-known passage, so full of deep, quiet beauty is it:

"But the majestic river floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,

Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,
Under the solitary moon; he flow'd
Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
Brimming, and bright, and large; then sands begin
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer — till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea."

Not unlike the movement of the Oxus was the life of the poet whose song has touched it with a beauty not its own; a life fretted by jealousies, broken by stupid treachery, but sweeping onward, true to its star, and finding peace at last in that fathomless sea to which all life is tributary. The pathos of such life lies not so much in individual suffering as in the contrast between the service rendered and the recognition accorded to it. The poet had

immortalised his country and his master, and his reward after thirty years of toil was a long exile.

"In vain through sixty thousand verses clear
He sang of feuds and battles, friend and foe,
Of the frail heart of Kaous, spent with fear,
And Kal Khosrau who vanished in the snow,
And white-haired Zal who won the secret love
Of Rudabeh where water-lilies blow,
And lordliest Rustem, armed by gods above
With every power and virtue mortals know."

For this inestimable service of holding aloft over Persian history the torch of the imagination until it lay clear and luminous in the sight of the centuries, Firdousi was condemned to learn the bitterness of wide and restless wanderings. Many a Tartar camp knew him; Herat, the mountains about the Caspian, Astrabad, the Tigris, and Bagdad saw the white-haired poet pass, or accorded him a brief and broken rest from journeying. There is an atmosphere of poetry about these ancient names, but no association is likely to linger longer in the memory of men than the fact that they were stations in Firdousi's exile. It is one

of the unconscious gifts of genius that it bestows immortality upon all who come into relation with it. But the crowning touch of pathos came at the close, when the long-withheld treasure entered the gates of Tous as the body of the poet was borne out of the city to its last repose. The repentance of Mahmoud had come too late; he had blindly thrust aside the richest crown of good fame ever offered to a Persian king.

But there are sadder stories than that of Firdousi; one story, notably, which all men recall instinctively when they speak of exile. The Persian poet had written the "Epic of Kings" in a palace, and with the resources of a king at command, but Dante was a homeless wanderer in the years which saw the birth of the Divine Comedy. To that great song in which the heart of Mediævalism was to live forever, Florence contributed nothing but the anguish of soul through which the mind slowly finds its way to the highest truth. A noble nature, full of deep convictions, fervent loves, with the sensitiveness and prophetic sight of genius, cut off from all

natural channels of growth, activity, and ambition, condemned to

"... prove how salt a savour hath
The bread of others, and how hard a path
To climb and to descend the stranger's stairs."

Surely no great man ever ate his bread wet with tears of deeper bitterness than Dante. One has but to recall his stern love of truth and his intense sensitiveness to injustice, to imagine in some degree what fathomless depths of suffering lay hidden from the eyes of men under that calm, majestic composure of manner and speech. The familiar story of his encounter with the Florentine blacksmith comes to mind as indicating how his proud spirit resented the slightest injustice. One morning as the blacksmith was singing snatches from the song of the new poet, Dante passed by, listened a moment, and then, in a sudden passion, strode into the shop and began throwing the implements which the smith had about him into the street.

"What are you doing? Are you mad?" cried the blacksmith, so overcome with astonishment that he made no effort to protect his property.

"And what are *you* doing?" replied the poet, fast emptying the shop of its tools.

"I am working at my proper business, and you are spoiling my work."

"If you do not wish me to spoil your things, do not spoil mine."

"What thing of yours am I spoiling?"

"You are singing something of mine, but not as I wrote it. I have no other trade but this, and you spoil it for me."

The poet departed as abruptly as he came. He had satisfied the sense of injustice done him by swift punishment; and it does not surprise us to be told by Sacchetti that the blacksmith, having collected his scattered tools and returned to his work, henceforth sang other songs. This simple incident discloses that sensitiveness to injustice which made the banishment of Dante one long torture of soul. They utterly mistake the nature of greatness who imagine that the bitterest sorrow of such experiences as those of Firdousi and Dante lies in loss of those things which most men value; the sharpest thorn in such crowns is the sense of ingratitude and injustice, the consciousness

of the possession of great gifts rejected and cast aside. There is nothing more tragic in all the range of life than the fate of those who, like Jeremiah, Cassandra, and Tiresias, are condemned to see the truth, to speak it, and to be rebuked and rejected by the men about them. Could anything be more agonising than to see clearly an approaching danger, to point it out, and be thrust aside with laughter or curses, and then to watch, helpless and solitary, the awful and implacable approach of doom? In some degree this lot is shared by every poet, and to the end of time every poet will find such a sorrow a part of his birthright.

"After all," said Rosalind, suddenly breaking the silence of thought that has evidently travelled along the same path as my own — "after all, I 'm not sure that they are to be pitied."

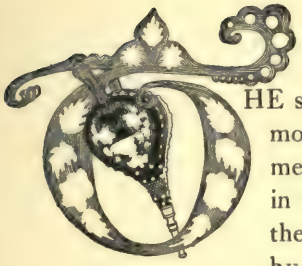
"Pity is the last word I should think of in connection with them; it is only a confusion of ideas which makes us even feel like pitying them. The real business of life, as Carlyle tried so hard to make us believe, is to find the truth and to live by

it. If, in the doing of this, what men call happiness falls to our lot, well and good; but it must be as an incident, not as an end. There come to great, solitary, and sorely smitten souls moments of clear sight, of assurance of victory, of unspeakable fellowship with truth and life and God, which outweigh years of sorrow and bitterness. Firdousi knew that he had left Persia a priceless possession, and the Purgatorio of Dante was not too much to pay for the Paradiso."

"And yet," said Rosalind slowly, looking into the fire, and thinking, perhaps, of the children asleep with happy dreams, and all the sweet peace of the home — "and yet how much they lose!"

CHAPTER V

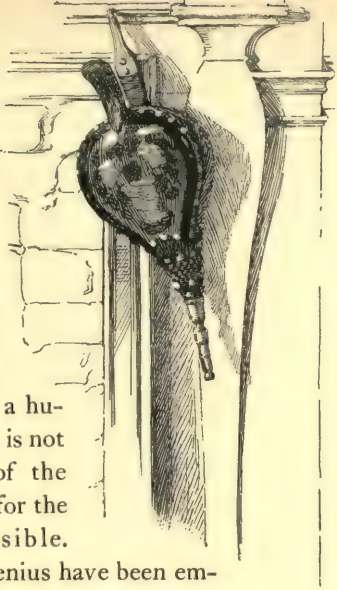
THE FAILINGS OF GENIUS



THE study fire burns for the most part in a quiet, meditative way that falls in with the thought and the talk that are inspired by it. Occasionally, however, it crackles and snaps in an argumentative mood that makes one wonder what sort of communication it is trying to have with the world around it. Is it the indignant protest of some dismembered tree ruthlessly cut down in the morning of life, that energetically but ineffectually sputters itself forth in the glowing heat? Perhaps if Gilbert White, or Thoreau, or Burroughs happened to fill my easy-chair at such a moment, this question might be answered; I, in my ignorance, can only ask it. Of one thing I am certain, how-

ever: that when the fire falls into this humour it is quite likely to take Rosalind and myself with it; on such occasions the quiet talk or the long, uninterrupted reading gives place to a discussion which is likely to be prolonged until the back-log falls in two and the ashes lie white and powdery around the expiring embers. Even then the pretty bellows which came several Christmases ago from one whose charm makes it impossible to use the word common even to describe her friendship for Rosalind and myself, are vigorously used to give both fire and talk a few minutes' grace.

It is generally concerning some fact or event which disturbs Rosalind's idealisation of life that these discussions rise and flourish. This charming woman persists, for instance, in declining to take any account of traits and characteristics in eminent men of letters which impair the symmetry of the ideal literary life; with delightful feminine insistence, she will have her literary man a picturesque ideal, or else will not have him at all. For myself, on the other hand, I am rather attracted than



repelled by the failings of great men; in their human limitations, their prejudices, their various deflections from the line of perfect living, I find the ties that link them to myself and to a humanity whose perfection is not only a vague dream of the future, but actually and for the deepest reasons impossible. The faults of men of genius have been emphasised, misrepresented, and exaggerated in a way that makes most writing about such men of no value to those who care for truth. The men are few in every age who can honestly and intelligently enter into and possess the life of a former time; the men who can comprehend a human life that belongs to the past are fewer still. The writers who have been most active, radical, and influential are those whose secret is most likely to escape the search of biographers and critics. Most of what has been written about such men, for instance, as Petrarch, Goethe, Voltaire, Heine, Carlyle, may be

wisely consigned to that insatiable spirit of flame which devours falsehoods and crude, worthless stuff with the same appetite which it brings to the choicest books in the world. Men of genius are as much amenable to law as the meanest of their fellow-creatures, but the latter are not always the best interpreters of that law. English criticism owes Carlyle an immense debt for destroying the superstition that every man of letters must be brought to the bar of the Thirty-nine Articles; and criticism in this country is slow to learn from such spirits as Emerson the true standards and measures of greatness. For the most part, ignorance and stupid unbelief have waylaid and attempted to throttle those hardy spirits who have ventured to set foot in the Temple of Fame.

Men of genius, as I often tell Rosalind, must always stand a very poor chance with the conventional people; the people, that is, who accept the traditional standards they find about them, and who live on the surface of things. It is the constant tendency of life, like the earth's crust, to cool off and harden; it is the common task of

all men of original power to reverse this course of things. A good many men perform this duty in a needlessly offensive manner; they lack the sound sense of Richter, who, when he found that his habit of omitting the omnipresent collar from his toilet set all tongues a-wagging, wisely concluded to conform to fashion in a trivial matter, in order that he might put his whole strength into a struggle on vital principles. And yet there is no reason why a great man should not indulge in his little idiosyncrasy if he chooses to; surely intelligent men and women ought to be about better business than commenting on the length of Tennyson's hair or the roll of Whitman's coat. In a world in which so many people wear the same clothes, live in the same house, eat the same dinner, and say the same things, blessed are the individualities who are not lost in the mob, who have their own thoughts and live their own lives. The case of the man of genius can be put in a paragraph: the conventional people control society; they can never understand him; hence the cloud of misconception and

misrepresentation in which he lives and dies. To a man of sensitive temperament this process is often intensely painful; to a man of virile temper it is often full of humorous suggestion. Gifted men take a certain satirical satisfaction in bringing into clear light the innocent ignorance of those whose every word of criticism or laudation betrayed a complete misconception. The charming old story of Sophocles's defence of himself by simply reading to the Athenian jury the exquisite choral ode on Colonos would sound apocryphal if told of a modern jury. The case of Carlyle furnishes a good illustration; among all the mass of writing relating to this man of genius that has been poured upon a defenceless world, it is safe to say that one can count on the fingers of one hand the articles that have betrayed any real understanding of the man. One readily understands, in the light of this and similar past records, the fervour with which Sir Henry Taylor reports Tennyson as saying that he thanked God with his whole heart and soul that he knew nothing, and that the world knew nothing, of Shakespeare but

his writings! In these days a man of letters takes his life in his hand when he takes up his pen; the curse of publicity which attaches itself not only to his work but to himself is as comprehensive as an Arab imprecation; it covers his ancestry and his posterity with impartial malediction. When such a dust from rude and curious feet has half suffocated one all his life, he must be ready to say with the Laureate:

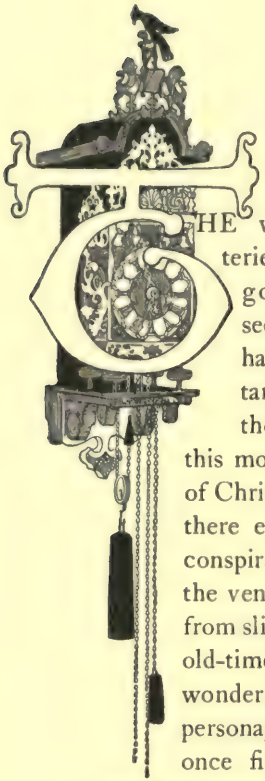
"Come not, when I am dead,
To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave,
To trample round my fallen head,
And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save.
There let the wind sweep and the plover cry;
But thou, go by.

"Child, if it were thine error or thy crime
I care no longer, being all unblest;
Wed whom thou wilt, but I am sick of Time,
And I desire to rest.
Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie —
Go by, go by."

There is a respect, a deference, a deep and vital affection, in which the true man of

letters finds one of his sweetest and purest rewards; the mind and heart which hospitably receive his truest thought and honour him for it must always command an answering glow of gratitude. It is the vulgar love of novelty, publicity, mere cleverness, from which the man of genius shrinks. Perhaps the bitterest experience in the life of the Teacher of Galilee was the eagerness with which the crowds looked for miracles, the apathy with which they listened to truth. Through the noise and roar of the shallow current of popular applause there runs for every genuine man of letters a deep, quiet current of intelligent sympathy and love which fertilises his life wherever it comes in contact with it. Of this true and honest homage to what is best and noblest in one's work, Sir Henry Taylor gives an illustration: "I met in the train yesterday a meagre, sickly, peevish-looking, elderly man, not affecting to be quite a gentleman . . . and on showing him the photographs of Lionel Tennyson which I carried in my hand, he spoke of 'In Memoriam,' and said he had made a sort of churchyard of it, and had

appropriated some passage of it to each of his departed friends, and that he read it every Sunday, and never came to the bottom of the depths of it. More to be prized this, I thought, than the criticism of critics, however plauditory."



CHAPTER VI

CHRISTMAS EVE

THE world has been full of mysteries to-day; everybody has gone about weighted with secrets. The children's faces have fairly shone with expectancy, and I enter easily into the universal dream which at this moment holds all the children of Christendom under its spell. Was there ever a wider or more loving conspiracy than that which keeps the venerable figure of Santa Claus from slipping away, with all the other old-time myths, into the forsaken wonderland of the past? Of all the personages whose marvellous doings once filled the minds of men, he alone survives. He has outlived all the great gods, and all the impressive and poetic

conceptions which once flitted between heaven and earth; these have gone, but Santa Claus remains by virtue of a common understanding that childhood shall not be despoiled of one of its most cherished beliefs, either by the mythologist, with his sun-myth theory, or the scientist, with his heartless diatribe against superstition. There is a good deal more to be said on this subject, if this were the place to say it; even superstition has its uses, and sometimes its sound heart of truth. He who does not see in the legend of Santa Claus a beautiful faith on one side, and the naïve embodiment of a divine fact on the other, is not fit to have a place at the Christmas board. For him there should be neither carol, nor holly, nor mistletoe; they only shall keep the feast to whom all these things are but the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace.

Rosalind and myself are thoroughly orthodox when it comes to the keeping of holidays; here at least the ways of our fathers are our ways also. Orthodoxy generally consists in retaining and emphasising the disagreeable ways of the fathers,

and as we are both inclined to heterodoxy on these points, we make the more prominent our observance of the best of the old-time habits. I might preach a pleasant little sermon just here, taking as my text the "survival of the fittest," and illustrating the truth from our own domestic ritual; but the season preaches its own sermon, and I should only follow the example of some ministers and get between the text and my congregation if I made the attempt. For weeks we have all been looking forward to this eventful evening and the still more eventful morrow. There have been hurried and whispered conferences hastily suspended at the sound of a familiar step on the stair; packages of every imaginable size and shape have been surreptitiously introduced into the house, and have immediately disappeared in all manner of out-of-the-way places; and for several weeks past one room has been constantly under lock and key, visited only when certain sharp-sighted eyes were occupied in other directions. Through all this scene of mystery Rosalind has moved sedately and with sealed lips, the common

confidant of all the conspirators, and herself the greatest conspirator of all. Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love!

After dinner, eaten, let it be confessed, with more haste and less accompaniment of talk than usual, the parlour doors were opened, and there stood the Christmas tree in a glow of light, its wonderful branches laden with all manner of strange fruits not to be found in the botanies. The wild shouts, the merry laughter, the cries of delight as one coveted fruit after another dropped into long-expectant arms still linger in my ears now that the little tapers are burnt out, the boughs left bare, and the actors in the perennial drama are fast asleep, with new and strange bedfellows selected from the spoils of the night. Cradled between a delightful memory and a blissful anticipation, who does not envy them?

After this charming prelude is over, Rosalind comes into the study, and studies for the fortieth time the effect of the new design of decoration which she has this year worked out, and which gives these

rather sombre rows of books a homelike and festive aspect. It pleases me to note the spray of holly that obscures the title of Bacon's solemn and weighty "Essays," and I get half a page of suggestions for my note-

book from the fact that a sprig of mistletoe has fallen on old Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." Rosalind has reason to be satisfied, and if I read her face aright she has succeeded even in her own eyes in bringing Christmas, with its fragrant memories and its heavenly visions, into the study. I cannot help thinking, as I watch her piling up the fire for a blaze of unusual splendour, that if more studies had their Rosalinds to bring in the genial currents of life there would be more cheer and hope and large-hearted wisdom in the books which the world is reading to-day.

When the fire has reached a degree of intensity and magnitude which Rosalind thinks adequate to the occasion, I take down a well-worn volume which opens of itself at a well-worn page. It is a book which I have read and re-read many times, and always with a kindling sympathy and affection for the man who wrote it; in whatever mood I take it up there is something in it which touches me with a sense of kinship. It is not a great book, but it is a book of the heart, and books of the

heart have passed beyond the outer court of criticism before we bestow upon them that phrase of supreme regard. There are other books of the heart around me, but on Christmas Eve it is Alexander Smith's "Dreamthorp" which always seems to lie at my hand, and when I take it up the well-worn volume falls open at the essay on "Christmas." It is a good many years since Rosalind and I began to read together on Christmas Eve this beautiful meditation on the season, and now it has gathered about itself such a host of memories that it has become part of our common past. It is, indeed, a veritable palimpsest, overlaid with tender and gracious recollections out of which the original thought gains a new and subtle sweetness. As I read it aloud I know that she sees once more the familiar landscape about Dreamthorp, with the low, dark hill in the background, and over it "the tender radiance that precedes the moon"; the village windows are all lighted, and the "whole place shines like a congregation of glowworms." There are the skaters still "leaning against the frosty wind"; there is the "gray church

"In their best dresses and their best faces."

tower amid the leafless elms," around which the echoes of the morning peal of Christmas bells still hover; the village folk have gathered, "in their best dresses and their best faces"; the beautiful service of the church has been read and answered with heartfelt responses, the familiar story has been told again simply and urgently, with applications for every thankful soul, and then the congregation has gone to its homes and its festivities.

All these things, I am sure, lie within Rosalind's vision, although she seems to see nothing but the ruddy blaze of the fire; all these things I see, as I have seen them these many Christmas Eves agone; but with this familiar landscape there are mingled all the sweet and sorrowful memories of our common life, recalled at this hour that the light of the highest truth may interpret them anew in the divine language of hope.

I read on until I come to the quotation from the "Hymn to the Nativity," and then I close the book, and take up a copy of Milton close at hand. We have had our commemoration service of love, and now there comes into our thought, with the organ roll of this sublime hymn, the universal truth which lies at the heart of the season. I am hardly conscious that it is my voice which makes these words audible: I am conscious only of this mighty-voiced anthem, fit for the choral song of the morning stars:

"Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
And bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch our senses so;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow;
And, with your ninefold harmony,
Make up full concert to the angelic symphony.

"For, if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold;
And speckled vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould;

The beautiful service of the church has been read

And hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

. . . . .

"The oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the archèd roof in words deceiving;
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving,
No nightly trance or breathèd spell
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

"The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
From haunted spring, and dale
Edgèd with poplars pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent;
With flower-enwoven tresses torn,
The nymphs in twilight shades of tangled thickets mourn."

. . . . .

Like a psalm the great Hymn fills the air, and like a psalm it remains in the memory. The fire has burned low, and a soft and solemn light fills the room. Neither of us speaks while the clock

strikes twelve. I look out of the window. The heavens are ablaze with light, and somewhere amid those circling constellations I know that a new star has found its place, and is shining with such a ray as never before fell from heaven to earth.

CHAPTER VII

NEW YEAR'S EVE

E last fire of many that have blazed on my hearth these twelve months gone is fast sinking into ashes. I do not care to revive its expiring flame, because I find its slow fading into darkness harmonious with the hour and the thought which comes with it as the shadow follows the cloud. While it is true that our division of time into years is purely conventional and finds no recognition or record on the great dial face of the heavens, no man can be quite oblivious of it. New Year's Eve is like every other night; there is no pause in the march of the universe, no breathless moment of silence among created things that the passage of another twelve months may be noted; and yet no man has quite

the same thoughts this evening that come with the coming of darkness on other nights. The vast and shadowy stream of time sweeps on without break, but the traveller who has been journeying with it cannot be entirely unmindful that he is perceptibly nearer the end of his wanderings. It is an old story, this irresistible and ceaseless onflow of life and time; time always scattering the flowers of life with a lavish hand along its course; but each man recalls it for himself, and to each it wears some new aspect. The vision of Mirza never wholly fades from the sight of men.

From such thoughts as these, which would be commonplace enough if it were not for the pathos in them, I am recalled by a singular play of the expiring flames on the titles of my books. Many of these are so indistinct that I cannot read them; indeed, the farther corners of the room are lost entirely in the gloom that is fast gaining on the dying light. But there are two rows of books whose titles I discover readily as I sit before the fire, and I note that they are the great, vital works which belong to all races and times; the books which form the richest inheritance of each new generation, and which the whole world has come to hold as its best possession. In the deepening shadows, and at this solitary hour, there is something deeply significant, something solemn and consoling, in the great names which I read there. A multitude of other names, full of light and beauty in their time, have been remorselessly swept into oblivion by the fading of the light; at this moment they are as utterly vanished as if they had never been. But these other names — and I note among them Homer, Dante, Shake-

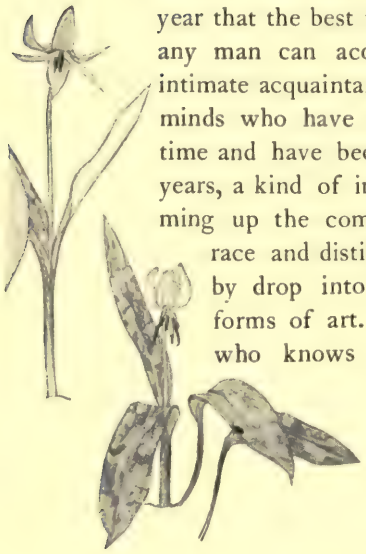
speare, Milton, Goethe, Cervantes — stand out clear and familiar amid even the shadows.

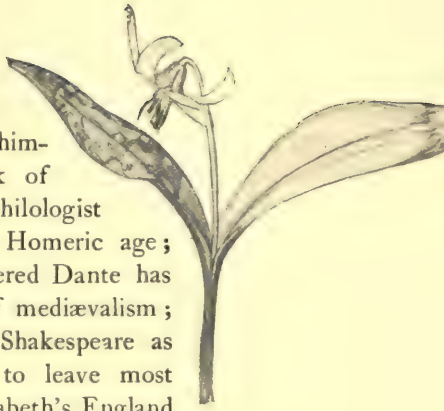
I recall the old maxim of the English common law, that no time runs against the king, and I see at a glance the deep and wide meaning which escapes from the meshes of legal interpretation. Here truly are the kings, and to them time is as if it were not. It has run against the Greek race and the Greek language, but not against Homer; it has run against mediæval Florence and the Italy just on the threshold of the Renaissance, but not against Dante; it has run against the sturdy England of Elizabeth, but not against Shakespeare. All are dead save the kings, and when one remembers what they have outlived of power and wealth and learning and civilisation, one feels that here are the inheritors of immortality. A library is, more truly than any other place to which men may go, a place of refuge against time. Not that time does not come here; those forgotten names on the upper shelves bear witness to its power; but here, at least, are some whose serene

faces have the majesty of a work of Phidias; that large, calm, penetrating look of immortality of the elder kings when they stood in unbroken line with the gods. Every library which has its poets' corner — and what library has not? — possesses the memorials of royalty more truly than Westminster itself; more really, in fact, because these kings are not dead. They rule a mightier host to-day than ever before, and the boundaries of their common realm are also the frontier lines of civilisation. In such company the passage of time is, after all, a thing of little account. It destroys only the imperfect, the partial, the limited, the transitory; here are the truths over which time has no power, because they are part of that eternity to which it is itself tributary. And just here is the secret of the immortality which these kings have inherited; they have passed through all the appearances of things, the passing symbols and the imperfect embodiments of truth to truth itself, which is contemporaneous with every age and race. Time destroys only the symbols and the inadequate expression of truth, but it is

powerless to touch truth. The writers who were once famous and now forgotten were men who caught the aspect of the hour and gave it graceful or forceful expression; but when the hour passed, the book which grew out of it went with it as the flower goes with the season which saw its blossoming. The book of the moment often has immense vogue, while the book of the age, which comes in its company from the press, lies unnoticed; but the great book has its revenge. It lives to see its contemporary pushed up shelf by shelf until it finds its final resting-place in the garret or the auction room.

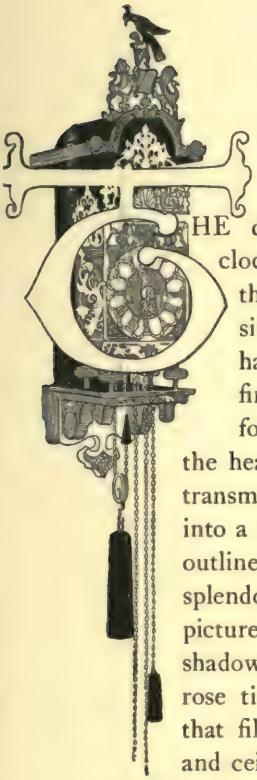
The conviction deepens in me year by year that the best possible education which any man can acquire is a genuine and intimate acquaintance with these few great minds who have escaped the wrecks of time and have become, with the lapse of years, a kind of impersonal wisdom, summing up the common experience of the race and distilling it drop by drop into the perfect forms of art. The man who knows his Homer





thoroughly knows more about the Greeks than he who has familiarised himself with all the work of the archæologist and philologist and historians of the Homeric age; the man who has mastered Dante has penetrated the secret of mediævalism; the man who counts Shakespeare as his friend can afford to leave most other books about Elizabeth's England unread. To really know Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe is to know the best the world has thought and said and done, is to enter into that inheritance of experience and knowledge which is the truest, and at bottom the only, education. Most of us know too many writers, and waste our strength in a vain endeavour to establish relations of intimacy with a multitude of men, great and small, who profess to have some claim upon us. It is both pleasant and wise to have a large acquaintance, to know life broadly and at its best; but our intimate friends can never, in the nature of things, be many. We may know a host of interesting peo-

ple, but we can really live with but a few. And it is these few and faithful ones whose names I see in the dying light of the old year and the first faint gleam of the new.



CHAPTER VIII

A SCHOLAR'S DREAM

THE delicate hands of the little clock on the mantel indicated that thirty minutes had passed since the musical chimes within had rung eleven. The open fire below was burning brightly, for the flame had eaten into the heart of the back log, and was transmuting its slow, rich growth into a warm glow that touched the outlines of the room with a soft splendour and made a charming picture of its mingled lights and shadows. The learning of the world rose tier above tier on the shelves that filled the space between floor and ceiling, and following the lines of gold lettering along the unbroken rows, one read august and imperial names in the

kingdom of thought. An ample writing-table, piled high with pamphlets and books, stood in the centre of the room, and the loose sheets of paper carelessly thrown together gave evidence of a work only recently interrupted. Without, the solemn silence of midnight and the radiant stars brooded over the stainless fields, white with freshly fallen snow.

Ralph Norton had been looking into the fire these thirty minutes in a meditation that was almost wholly pathetic. His seventy years passed in swift procession before him, coming up one by one out of the invisible past, and pronouncing an inaudible judgment upon his career. There was a presence of indefinable and unusual solemnity in the time, for it was the close of a century, and in a brief half-hour another hundred years would be rounded to completion. By the common judgment of the thinking world, Ralph Norton was the foremost man of his age; no other had felt its doubts so keenly, or drank in its inspiration with such a mighty thirst as he. His thought had searched into its secret places and mastered all its wisdom;

his heart had felt its deep pulsations in the solitude of unbroken and heroic studies; his genius had given its spirit a voice of matchless compass and eloquence. For half a century the world had laid his words to heart, and built its faith upon his thinking. While the busy tides of activity ebbed and flowed through the great channels of civilisation, he had lived apart in a deep, earnest, and whole-hearted consecration to truth. The clearly cut features, the keen, benignant eyes, the noble poise of head, the wistful expression as of one striving to pierce the heart of some mystery, were signs of a personality that had left its impress on two generations, and now, in its grand maturity, was still waiting for some larger fulfilment of the promise of life. Behind him, among the throng of books, indistinguishable in the dim light, were the works into which the life of his life had gone. They recorded explorations into many fields, they had torn down old faiths amid storms of discussion and condemnation, they had laid new foundations for belief in the silence of meditative and self-forgetful years. The

strength and the weakness of the age had written themselves upon those pages, in the ebbing of inherited belief and the inflow of convictions born out of new insight into and new contact with the experiences of life.

The old man sat motionless, with his eyes fixed on the slow moving hands; he seemed to be numbering the brief moments of his unfinished career. The century which had spoken through him was ebbing to its last second, and as it sank silently into the gulf of years his own thought seemed to pause in its daring flight, his own voice to sink into silence. The age and its master had done their work, and now, in the dim light of a room over which the spirit of the one had brooded and in which the brain and hand of the other had wrought, they were about to separate. The delicate hands moved on without consciousness of the mighty life whose limits they were fast registering, the stars looked down from the eternity in which they shone unmindful of the change from era to era, the world of men was remote and unconscious; the old man was alone

with the sinking fire and the passing century. The minute hand moved on, the fire flashed up fitfully and sank down in ashes, there was a moment of hush, and then slowly and solemnly the chimes in the little clock rang twelve. Norton shivered as if a sudden chill had struck him, and peal on peal through the midnight air the bells rang in a new century.

The man who had worked as few men work, and yet had shown no sign of breaking, felt strangely old in a moment, and the carol of the bells, flinging across the hills their jubilant welcome of the new time, struck on his inner ear like a requiem for a past that was irrevocably gone. In an instant life lost its familiar and homelike aspect, the impalpable presence of the new century rose like a vast empty house through which no human feet had walked, in which no human hearts had beat, over which no atmosphere of hope and love and dear old usage hung warm and genial. Norton had become a stranger; his citizenship had gone with the age which had conferred it; his friendships seemed dim and ghostly, like myths out of which the

currents of life had ebbed. With a sinking heart, groping like one suddenly become blind for some familiar thing, he turned and looked at the row of books behind him upon whose covers his name was stamped. In the receding world that was swiftly moving away from him they alone remained faithful.

"My life is but a breath," he said, as his eye fell upon them; "but thought does not die, and here I have written my own immortality. Here is the record of all I have felt and thought and done. These books are myself; and though I perish I live again."

The old man's eye ran down the line, and recalled, as it fell upon volume after volume, how each had grown into being. Here were books of keen, open-eyed, and tireless observation, into which had gone years of unbroken study of external life, with such fruitful results as come to the man of trained faculty, of deep insight, and of heroic patience. Here were works of daring speculation that had traversed the whole realm of knowledge and struck luminous lines of order through many an

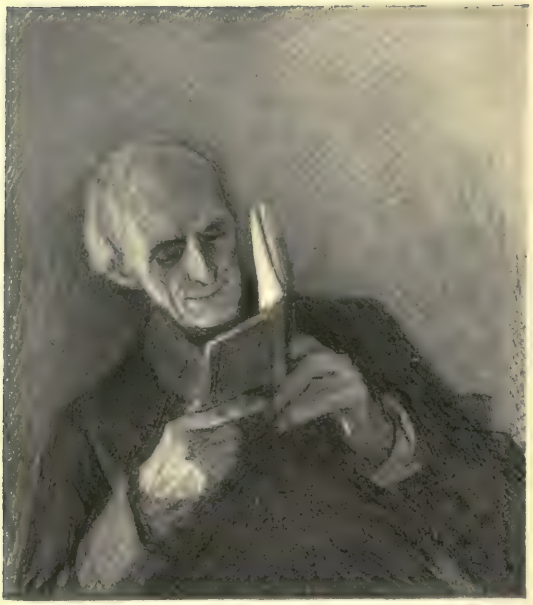
outlying darkness. Upon these volumes Norton's eye rested with peculiar delight; those which had gone before were only his careful reports of the world without him, these were the mighty lines into which he had put his meditations on the problems of the universe; these were the utterance of his ripest thought, the fruitage of his best hours, the outcome of his long training, his laborious studies, his whole thoughtful life. In these books he knew that the vanished century had written itself most deeply and truly. Here were the eloquent lines in which its very soul seemed to burn with self-revealing splendour; here were its affirmations and its negations; here was, in a word, the sum and substance of that individual thought, spirit, sentiment, which made it different from the centuries that went before and would forever keep it distinct and apart from the centuries that were to follow.

At the end of the shelf was a thin volume, modest, unpretentious, almost trivial beside the greater works around it. The light of pride faded out of the old man's eyes when they rested upon this

little book, and a deep, unutterable pathos filled them with unshed tears. There had been one year of his prosperous life when the light of the sun was darkened and the beauty of the heavens overhung with clouds; one year when his habits of investigation had been cast aside; when thinking mocked him with its insufficiency and the search for truth seemed idle and unreal; one year when the sorrows of his own heart rolled like billows over the pursuits of his mind, over the aims of his career, and rose until they threatened the whole universe in which he lived. He ceased to observe, to speculate, and only felt. The training of the schools, the long discipline of his maturity, the gifts and acquisitions of which lifted him above his fellow, seemed to vanish out of his life and left him only human; he was one with the vast throng about him who were toiling, loving, suffering, and dying under all the manifold experiences of humanity. In that year there was much that was sacred and incommunicable, much that had receded into the silence of his deeper self; but months later, when the agony of

grief had spent itself and the passion and bitterness had gone, while the heart was yet tender and tremulous with sympathy, this little book had been born. It was a transcription of experience; there were training, culture, deep thought on every page, but these were fused, vitalised, humanised by suffering, by struggle, by aspiration. It was a chapter out of living history; the mind of the universe was there in hint and suggestion of bold thought, but the heart of the universe was still more truly there in hushed pulsations.

Norton rose from his chair and took the book from its place on the shelf. Its covers were worn as if with much handling, its pages bore evidence of frequent reading, and as the leaves fell apart in his hand tender and sorrowful memories came back to the lonely old man with a strange pathos. He held the worn book almost reverently, the music of unforgotten years sounded again in his soul, buried hopes rose from their sepulchres and were radiant with life and promise as of old, love that had been groping and waiting in the shadows of eternity these many years once more



had vision of vanished faces, and all the sweet use and habit of happy days returned with their precious ministries. Norton opened page after page of the past as he turned page after page of the little book.

"The world cares little for this," he said to himself at last, as he returned it to its place; "this is only for me; time will

leave it with the age which saw its birth, as a thing too trivial and personal to be carried on the march."

Then he sat down once more, gathered the few coals together, blew them into a little glow, and rekindled the dead fire. The bells had long been silent, and the first hour of the new age was already spent. The old man watched the fire as it rose cheerfully out of the ashes of the earlier burning, receiving the touch of flame from it and then sending out its own new glow and heat. Out of this simple process, which he had watched a thousand times before, a truth seemed to take form and project itself far on into the coming time. The past slowly drifted out of his thought, which moved forward as if to discover what lay behind the veil of the future. The low, monotonous ticking of the little clock became, in his ears, the audible pulsations of time. At first the beats were slow and far apart; but as he listened they seemed to multiply, the minutes swiftly lengthened into hours, the hours ran into years, and the years moved on silently into centuries.

Almost without surprise Norton felt that two centuries had gone. He turned from the fire on which his gaze had been fixed and looked about the room. It was still the working room of a man of letters, but it was strangely changed. Books rose as formerly from floor to ceiling in unbroken ranks; but Norton, whose knowledge of literature had been so exact and comprehensive, knew barely one of the names stamped on the backs. His eye ran anxiously along the titles, and when it rested upon a familiar name he found but a tithe of the works which he had once known. Here and there a solitary volume greeted him like a friend in a crowd of strange faces. He searched for books that had been his hourly companions, and discovered only here and there a single thin volume, the sole residuum of a system of thought. With a pathetic interest he read the names that were meaningless to him, and taking down one of the strange volumes opened it at random. The first sentence that met his eye was a quotation from himself, the second commented upon his thought as an illustration of the crude

He read the first page carefully, and with a growing confusion of thought.

methods and untrustworthy results of earlier observers. "The writer from whom I have quoted," the author went on to say, "was a man whose integrity of mind was unquestioned by his contemporaries and must be undoubted by us, but, in the light of later research, it is difficult to understand how so keen an intellect could have mistaken so entirely the evident teaching of fact." Norton closed the book with a sinking heart. The theory held up as a conspicuous error was one upon which he had spent years of thought, and upon which his fame had largely rested.

He took down another volume and opened it also at random. He read the first page carefully, and with a growing confusion of thought. There were sentences which he could understand, but the page was incomprehensible to him. He read it more slowly and with an instinctive perception that it was a piece of close reasoning, but its meaning wholly eluded him. He caught glimpses of it and then it slipped away into mystery again. The writer's standpoint was so novel that he could not readily reach it; natural pro-

cesses and forces were suggested of which he was entirely ignorant. He opened book after book with the same result; a feeling of unutterable solitude came over him as it slowly dawned upon him that two centuries intervened between his thought and that of the men whose works were gathered around him. He was an alien in an age which had no place for him; a stranger in a world out of which all familiar objects had vanished.

At last he remembered his own work, and searched eagerly from case to case for the books into which he had poured the wealth of his mental life. Not a single volume was there, and the old thinker turned away with a despairing sigh.

"With all my conscience, my self-denial, my toil, I lived in vain," he said to himself. Then, feeling for a moment the force of an old habit, he drew a chair up to the writing-table and sat down. He grew more and more confused; the very titles on the pamphlets scattered over the table were incomprehensible to him. He glanced at the fire, and its flames were strange; they were fed by some material

unknown to him; the old familiar world had drifted hopelessly away.

Upon the writing-table lay a little volume with a few freshly written sheets folded between its pages. Norton opened the book mechanically, and then, with a suddenly aroused interest, turned quickly from page to page. The sight of the words was like the sound of a familiar voice in the darkness, or the opening of a window upon some familiar landscape. A soft light came into his eyes, and his face flushed with inexpressible happiness. The little book was his own thought and speech; not the outcome of his speculation and research, but the utterance of his one year of deep interior life. He glanced through it lovingly as one would read the soul of a friend, catching here and there some well-remembered sentence, some word stamped in the fire of his great trial, some phrase wrung out of his very soul. It mattered little to him now that the great works out of which he had thought to build an earthly immortality had vanished; this deepest and truest word of his soul, this most vital and genuine outcome

of his life, had survived the touch of time and still spoke to a living generation. As he turned from page to page the loose sheets slipped from the book upon the table. They had evidently been recently written, and seemed to be personal reflections rather than any formal composition.

"I have come to a place in my life," said the unknown writer, "from which I look back upon the past as one looks over a long course from the summit that commands it all. I have attained a great age and great honours, as the world counts honours, knowing perfectly that achievements are relative, not positive, and that I am simply less ignorant, not more learned, than my fellows. I find myself everywhere spoken of and written about as the first man of the age, its voice, prophet, interpreter, and what not, with a keen sense of the poverty of a century that can read its deepest thought in aught that I have said or written. I have given my life to the search for truth; I have travelled here and there for new outlooks; I have withdrawn into deep seclusions for new insights; I have questioned all the

sciences that have grown to such vast proportions, and tell us so fully and so accurately of the methods of being, but leave us as much in the dark as ever concerning its secret; I have drank deep at the fountains of ancient learning; I have studied all literatures and looked long and earnestly into the soul of man in the revelation of books. In a word, I have traversed the whole world of knowledge, and now, at the summit of my years, with such rewards as the reverence of all men can give me, I return to the point whence I set out. The universe still sweeps beyond me vaster and remoter for all my struggle to master it, the illimitable abysses are more awful because I have looked into them, the mystery of life is more insoluble because I have striven to pierce it. I have simply learned to live my own personal life with fortitude, patience, and trust.

"In my youth I came upon this little book, and was deeply moved by the disclosure of a suffering soul I found in it, by its unforced and unstudied depth of feeling, by the intensity of its humanity, by its agony, its love, and its faith. I learned it

almost by heart, and then I passed on into studies and speculations which seemed to dwarf it by their vastness. But I come back again to the goal from which I set out, to the guide who first opened the depths of my life, and who, through his own suffering, found the pathway into the heart of the mystery which I have missed in all my searching. When I remember how earnestly men have striven to think their way into the secrets of the universe, and how certainly they have failed, I see clearly that only he who lives into truth finds it, and that love alone is immortal."

Here the writing ended, and Norton felt himself in the presence of a mind as great and as sincere as his own. He replaced the loose sheets in the volume and laid the little book in its place; in his joy that any impulse from his own heart had touched and inspired another across the gulf of years he had found the true immortality. The fire had burned out, and as he bent over it to find some live coal among the ashes, the little clock on the mantel chimed two, and with a start he found himself in his own study.

Under some spell of silence.

CHAPTER IX

A FLAME OF DRIFTWOOD

E have been sitting to-night before a fire of driftwood, and, as the many-coloured flames have shot up, flickered, and gone out, thought has made all manner of vagrant journeyings. Rosalind has occasionally commented on some splendid tongue of fire, but for the most part we have been silent. There are nights — *noctes ambrosianæ* — when inspiring talk, that nectar of the gods, has held us long and made us reluctant to cover the smouldering embers. There are other nights when we fall under some spell of silence, and the world without us stirs into strange vividness the world within, and the chief importance of things visible and tangible seems to be their power to loosen thought

and set it free to spread its wings in the empyrean. When one falls into this mood and sits slippered and at ease before the crooning fire, while the wintry winds are trumpeting abroad, one easily comprehends the charm of Oriental mysticism; the charm of unbroken silence in which one pursues and at last overtakes himself. The world has vanished like a phantasmagoria; duties and cares and responsibilities have gone with the material relations and pursuits which gave them birth; one is alone with himself, and within the invisible horizons of his own thought all mysteries are hidden and revealed. I have often thought that if I ever turn heretic I shall be a fire-worshipper. These volatile flames have immense powers of disintegration; one can imagine the visible universe crumbling into ashes at their touch. But when they dance before the eye the disintegration they effect has something of the miracle of creation in it; so alive does the imagination become when this glow touches it, so swift is thought to pursue and overtake that which entirely eludes it by the light of day! I can hardly imagine myself

sitting motionless in broad daylight, in the unbroken calm of an anticipated Nirvana; but I can easily fancy myself under the perpetual spell of the fire spirit dreaming forever of worlds in which I have never lived.

The peculiar fascination of a driftwood fire is partly material and partly imaginative. The brilliancy of the flame, the unexpected transformations of colour, the swift movement of the restless waves of fire from log to log, the sudden splendour of hue breaking out of smoky blackness — all these material features supplement the unfailing association of the fagots themselves. They have no audible speech to report their journeyings, but the tropical richness of the flame which consumes them hints at all manner of strange wanderings in remote and strange parts of the earth. The secret of the sea where it breaks, phosphorescent, on the islands of the equator, seems to be hiding itself within those weird, bewildering flames. One feels as if he were near the mystery of that vast, dim life of the great seas so alien from all save the kindred solitariness and

majesty of the heavens; one feels as if something deeper and stranger than articulate life were revealing itself before him, if he but had the wit to understand it. This vast, silent world which girdles our little world of speech and action, as the great seas hold some island locked in their immeasurable wastes — is it not this sublime background of mystery which gives our books, our art, our achievements, their deepest and most pathetic meaning? One lays down a great book with a penetrating sense of its inadequacy. Judged by any human standard, we recognise its noble completeness; but measured against the world of suffering which it portrays, how like a solitary star it shines out of gulfs of impenetrable darkness! Scholars are still discussing the problem which Shakespeare presented in "Hamlet"; but as one takes up the tragedy in some moment of deeper insight and becomes suddenly conscious in his own thought of its deeper significance, becomes suddenly aware of the outlying gloom in which the poet's torch is swallowed up, how small the question of real or feigned insanity becomes! The slow

transformation of purpose into action has never been more completely or more marvellously told than in "The Ring and the Book." Never before have the secret processes of different minds been studied with such intensity of insight and brought to light with such vividness and splendour of expression. But when Count Guido and Pompilia and Caponsacchi and the Pope have each told their story, is it not the finest result of Browning's art that the pathos of the tragedy oppresses us as something still unexpressed, something essentially inexpressible? The secret of every great work of art is its power to send the imagination to search for itself in the dim world out of which it comes, never as a perfect creation, but always as a witness to the existence of something greater than itself. Our noblest words and works are to the great realities which they strive to reveal what the text-books of astronomy are to the immeasurable heavens of which they speak. It would be a poor world if any genius of man could fathom it and any language of man express it!

As the driftwood fire flickers and dances, I seem to feel about me the vast, dim seas whose hidden splendour it has brought into my study, and touched the oldest books with a new association, with a deep and strange suggestiveness. How imperfect are the most famous of these transcriptions of the soul and the wonderful world through which it travels; and yet how marvellously true and deep they are! Like these fagots, carelessly gathered on the beach, they have caught the secret of the fathomless deeps, and they are touched with a beauty not their own.

CHAPTER X

DREAM WORLDS

ROSALIND is not always quite sure that my occupations are entirely profitable. I notice at times an uncertain expression in her face when she finds me brooding over some old myth for hours together. I am conscious of a disapproval which is rarely expressed, but which is none the less unmistakable in a nature so unflinchingly and uncompromisingly honest. I do not mean that Rosalind has no liking for fables or old legends. On the contrary, I have heard her read the "Tanglewood Tales" and "Wonder Book" so many times to the children that I associate certain clear tones of her voice and certain characteristic accentuations with passages in the story of Midas and of Perseus. Rosalind's doubt is in regard to the great value

which I attach to these venerable fictions, and to the very considerable time I often devote to them. Last night, after I had given the fire a critical examination, and had settled back again in my chair to further reading of a new and fascinating book of popular tales, I noticed the faintest possible scepticism in Rosalind's face. Rosalind sometimes permits herself to suspect that I am wasting a day, and I fear there are occasional grounds for such a suspicion. There are days when the mind refuses to be put to any service; it lounges about according to its mood, and yields neither to persuasion nor to command. At such times I find myself obliged to keep my mind company, and I have no sense of responsibility for wasted time.

I am by no means certain that such days are lost; I am rather of opinion that they are days of special fertility, and that the mind comes back from its wanderings quickened and enriched by new contacts with life and truth. While Goldsmith was playing his flute for rustic dances in French villages, he was storing up impres-

sions and experiences that were to add a flavour to all his later work. But this reaction of the mind against routine, or against work of any kind, is not so much what I am thinking about now as that kind of fruitful dreaming out of which myths, legends, and imaginary creations of all sorts spring. It is surprising to find how many of the greatest works of literature have their roots in this withdrawal from the actual in order that the ideal may be approached and possessed. Last evening, when I noticed the faint touch of scepticism on Rosalind's face, I was quite ready to defend myself; in fact, that charming woman often tells me that I defend myself when no attack is intended; and this, I have no doubt, she recognises as a slight stirring of conscience on my part, and so receives fresh confirmation of her suspicions. I long ago recognised the fact that, as all roads lead to Rome, so do all devices end in disaster when the woman who knows one best is concerned. Peter the Great finally learned the secret of victory at the hands of the foes who so long defeated him; but in the peaceful

warfare which I have in mind, he is the wisest man who learns soonest that defeat is inevitable, and that resignation is the single flower that blooms on these well-contested fields. There are times when victory seems assured; one is armed at all points, and has made the most careful disposition of his forces. The enemy seems to have a foreboding of defeat; there is a lack of spirit in her resistance; she soon yields and draws one on, careless and confident. Suddenly there is a portentous change; the right wing is turned and flying, the left wing follows suit; the centre is seized with sudden panic, and gives way at the first attack. The reserve is brought up, and promptly routed, and one retires at last from the field, not sullen, but dazed, confused, and hopelessly perplexed. By every known law of military science he ought to have held his ground and routed the foe; his arguments were overpowering, his facts invincible; nevertheless he is a solitary fugitive. Those who have not gone through the experience will doubt this record of it; those who have passed through its varied phases will

instantly recognise its fidelity to nature, and will decline to confirm it; there is a conspiracy of silence on this subject among those who have fallen victims to rash confidence in their powers. It must be added that nothing can exceed the delicacy of behaviour on the part of the victor on such occasions. It is only by a little increase of colour, an irrepressible light in the eye, that the consciousness of success is betrayed. Friendly relations are immediately resumed, and one is even deluded into the conviction that his defeat was more apparent than real, and that in disaster his own greatness has become more evident, and been instantly recognised. This is a delightful feeling, and it survives as long as it remains unexpressed.

This is a long digression, but an open fire sings as many tunes as one has moods, and I make no apology for rambling from my subject. At that very moment Goethe's "Autobiography" lay open in Rosalind's lap; I gently disentangled it from some of that ornamental work which fringes all a woman's occupations, and read the legend of the poet's youth which he calls "The

New Paris." Goethe learned very early to tell stories acceptably; he came naturally by an art in which his mother excelled, of whom he says —

> "Von Mütterchen die Frohnatur
> Und Lust zu fabuliren."

His playfellows were constantly entertained by the recitals of his marvellous adventures, and they were delighted especially with his report of a certain garden into which he found his way through a gate in the city walls, and within whose magical boundaries all manner of strange things were seen by the adventurous boy. This was told so often and with such circumstantiality that it was accepted as fact not only by the listeners, but by the narrator himself. Each boy privately visited the part of the wall where the gate was supposed to be, and each found confirmation of the story. There were even warm discussions as to the exact position of certain wholly imaginary things which each one had seen.

Every one who has the privilege of being intrusted with the confidences of children knows that the imagination has an

Through a gate in the city walls

equal power with reality over them. They make imaginary or dream worlds, and sustain them by an unbroken faith until the light of knowledge slowly and sadly disintegrates them. The mind dreams, and creates worlds out of its dreams, as naturally and as inevitably as it observes and learns real things.

It is not surprising that a kinsman of one of the greatest dreamers of modern times should have been the architect of one of these ideal worlds. Hartley Coleridge believed fully that some day a stream would break out of the soil of a neighbouring meadow, and that along its swiftly created banks a new race would find its home and a new life organise itself. This was no vague dream; it was so real, so definite, and so continuous that the boy knew its geography as well as that of the country about it, and even made an accurate map of it. This secret possession of Hartley's imagination was shared by his brother Derwent, and for years the two boys watched the growth of nations on this invisible continent, the evolution of national institutions, religions, and laws;

they were spectators of battles and civic conflicts; they knew the private histories of the great generals and statesmen who arose from time to time; and in the long course of years they saw radical and far-reaching changes of government and society. Everybody remembers the ideal empire of Gombroon which De Quincey ruled in his youth, and the government of which, in an evil hour, he divided with his elder brother. The latter took such an aggressive attitude toward the people of Gombroon that the younger ruler was obliged to make a long and desperate struggle to preserve their independence. Things at length came to such a pass that, in order to defeat the machinations of an unscrupulous enemy, the creator of the invisible empire had to face the question of destroying it. "Ah, but no! I had contracted obligations to Gombroon; I had submitted my conscience to a yoke, and in secret truth my will had no such autocratic power. Long contemplation of a shadow, earnest study for the welfare of that shadow, sympathy with the wounded sensibilities of that shadow under accumu-

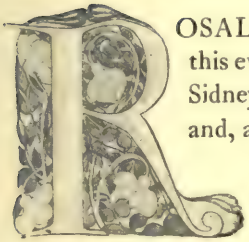
lated wrongs — these bitter experiences, nursed by brooding thought, had gradually frozen that shadow into a rigour of reality far denser than the material realities of brass or granite."

Such records of imaginative childhood as these might be multiplied indefinitely; they register not so much isolated activities as an inevitable and normal stage of development. It is a theory of mine that childhood contains in the germ all that maturity ever develops or displays, and I find particular illustration of this in the persistence and splendour with which this faculty of ideal creation has worked in the literature of the world. For instance — it occurs to me just here that I have wholly failed to report the discussion between Rosalind and myself which arose when I laid down the poker and settled back in the easy-

chair. I think it wisest, upon the whole, to leave that conversation unrecorded, but I hope no one will connect this decision on my part with what I have written in a strictly general way about such discussions.

CHAPTER XI

A TEXT FROM SIDNEY



OSALIND has given me a text this evening. She was reading Sidney's "Defence of Poesy," and, as a contribution to a talk we had been having on poetry, she read these words aloud: "Since, then, poetry is of all human learnings the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings; since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor barbarous nation is without it; since both Roman and Greek gave such divine names unto it, the one of prophesying, the other of making, and that indeed that name of making is fit for it, considering, that where all other arts retain themselves within their subject, receive, and as it were, their being from it, the poet only, only bringeth

his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit . . . I think, and think I think rightly, the laurel crown appointed for triumphant captains doth worthily, of all other learnings, honour the poet's triumph." These were familiar words, but they fitted my mood so perfectly that I seemed to be hearing them for the first time. I had spent the whole day in a world which a great poet had formed out

of the stuff of his imagination; a world sublimely ordered, as I looked into it, by the harmony of the imagination and the practical reason; the one building out of unsubstantial thought and touching with a bewildering and elusive beauty, the other moulding the structure to human needs and shaping it to human ends. The day made some escape from its sombre realities almost inevitable. Since early morning the rain had fallen ceaselessly, with a melancholy monotone that beat on one's heart. Even the cheerful notes of the fire, singing lustily as if to exorcise the demon of gloom and *ennui*, failed to shut out the steady murmur of the water falling from the leaden skies. Against such invasions of darkness there is always a refuge in the imagination, and I fled early to that nameless island in the undiscovered sea where Shakespeare's "Tempest" finds its sublime stage. Under the spell of this magical vision I had forgotten lowering skies and leaden-footed hours, and I was still in Shakespeare's world when Rosalind read the words from the "Defence of Poesy" which I have quoted.

I had but to stretch my hand to a shelf at my side to match the immortal young Elizabethan with the deeper eloquence of the Greek thinker whose speculations so often lead into the fields of poetry. It is to the well-worn words of Socrates to Ion that I open and read : " As the Corybantian revelers, when they dance, are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains : but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed, like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus, but not when they are in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves tell us ; for they tell us that they gather their strains from honeyed fountains out of the gardens and dells of the Muses ; thither, like the bees, they wing their way. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired, and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer

in him. . . . For in this way the God would seem to indicate to us, and not allow us to doubt that these beautiful poems are not human or the work of man, but divine and the word of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the gods by whom they are severally possessed."

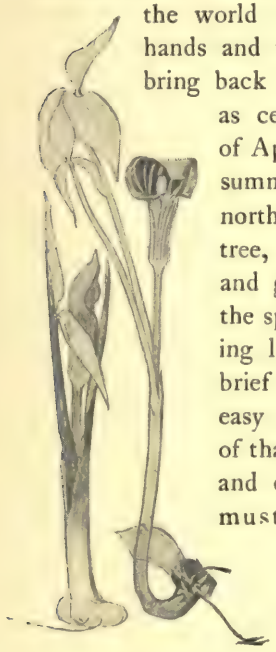
One needs nowadays to reinforce his faith in the ancient supremacy of the imagination by some such words as these from those masters of the higher reason who have established the reality of their faith by the sublimity and substance of their works. It is as idle to question the authority of the imagination in the presence of Shakespeare's "Tempest," or Plato's "Ion" or "Phædo," as to dispute the reality of music while Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" or Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" hold us silent and responsive to we know not what unspoken messages from some vaster world. It is not a matter of demonstration, of evidence or proof or logical deduction; it is always and only a flash of intelligence through the spiritual sense. Well says Abt Vogler in

Robert Browning's wonderful exposition of the whole matter:—

"Why rushed the discords on, but that harmony
should be prized?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to
clear;
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of
the weal and the woe;
But God has a few of us whom he whispers
in the ear;
The rest may reason, and welcome; 't is
we musicians know."

Literary epochs come and go, forms of expression change, but the method of the true poet remains the same; he does not reason — he sees, he hears, he knows. The reality of the Ideal, of the Spiritual, is never an open question with him; when it becomes one he ceases to be a poet. Scepticism which stimulates science blights poetry; the doubt which sends the mind restlessly abroad destroys in the same moment the home in which are the sources of its joy and its inspiration. Nothing in life is quite so pathetic as the artist who clings to his work after he has begun to

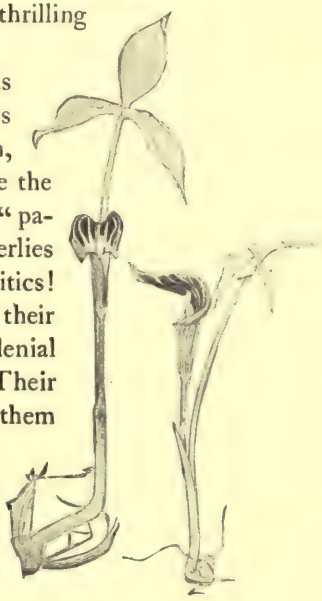
question its authority and validity. The toil remains, but the unspeakable joy of it is gone; and so also is that chance of possible perfection for the winning of which genius never hesitates to stake its all. It were better that the painters who doubt whether it is worth while to paint, and the musicians who question the sincerity of their art, and the poets who are haunted with the fear that the day of verse has gone, should refrain from all endeavour, and that the world should wait for the hands and the voices that must bring back the Ideal once more as certainly as the birds of April will announce the summer, coming swiftly northward with leaf for tree, and flower for stalk, and green for brown, and the splendour of overflowing light for days that are brief and shadowed. It is easy to deny the existence of that which one does not and cannot see, and this must be the cloak of



charity which one casts over those who write the epitaph of the Imagination and record with funereal reiteration the decline and disappearance of poetry. They do not write poetry: therefore poetry has ceased to be. Its sublime course runs out in a thin ripple of musical verse which only makes the glitter of the bare sand beneath the more obtrusive. There is a sure refuge from all these faint and querulous voices which make the silence of the great woods, once overflowing with affluent melodies, the more apparent. These light-voiced singers sing their little songs, not for the

wide skies and the great stars and the silent day perfumed with hidden flowers, but for the ears of men. One has but to leave the outer edges of the woodland to forget these feeble cries; one has but to seek the heart of the ancient forest to hear once more those magical notes which seem to rise out of the hidden world about him and to carry from its heart some secret to his own. The voices are still there; and, better than all, the sublime mysteries which charge those voices with thrilling music are there also.

Nature is still what she has been to all the great poets from Æschylus to Emerson, although the critics announce the final disappearance of the "pathetic fallacy" which underlies Wordsworth's verse. Poor critics! their offence lies not in their failure to see, but in their denial that Wordsworth saw. Their own defect of vision makes them certain that there is no true sight among men. But those who see are not concerned



with such denials; for them the sky is blue, though an army of blind men swear it black; and to those who hear, life is still thrilled with mysterious voices though the deaf proclaim an eternal silence. Among so many doubters and sceptics it is pleasant to hear still the unbroken testimony of the older poets to the truths that were clear to them when life and youth were one. In his latest verse Browning strikes the old chords with a virile touch which evokes no uncertain sound. He pictures the Fates couched dragon-wise in the heart of night, casting over the upper world a darkness as impenetrable as that in which they measure and cut the threads of existence, and summing up life in words that seem, save for their vigour, borrowed from some of our minor singers:—

"What 's infancy? Ignorance, idleness, mischief:
Youth ripens to arrogance, foolishness, greed:
Age — impotence, churlishness, rancour."

Into this chamber of blackness descends Apollo, and straightway a supernal light

breaks on the three terrible sisters, which they cannot dim by a torrent of fateful words. The shining God thrusts heaven upon them :—

" Regard how your cavern from crag-tip to base
Frowns sheer, height and depth adamantine, one death !
I rouse with a beam the whole rampart, displace
No splinter — yet see how my flambeau, beneath
And above, bids this gem wink, that crystal unsheathe."

This is the divine office of that Imagination of which Apollo will always remain the noblest symbol and the most significant creation. The fancy, delicate it may be as the flush on a rose or the sculptured line on a Grecian urn, can never take the place of that highest reason by which alone the ultimate truths are reached and the secrets of life revealed. The "idle singer of an empty day," the doubting, hesitant singer, uncertain of his song, can never touch the heart of humanity, nor make it one with the world about it. The true

poet is still the interpreter of the gods. "Thou true land-lord! sea-lord! air-lord! Wherever snow falls or water flows or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love — there is Beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee, and though thou shouldst walk the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble."

CHAPTER XII

THE ARTIST TALKS

AST night we sat late over the fire. It had been a blustering day, but at sunset the wind fell and the stars came out in splendid brilliancy. Rosalind had taken up her work, and we were anticipating a long, quiet evening, when the door opened and our friend the artist walked abruptly in. Without ceremony, he dropped his hat and coat on a chair, and almost before we realised that he was in the house he was standing before the fire warming his hands and saying that it was an uncommonly sharp night. No more welcome guest ever comes under our roof than the artist. Slender, alert, restless, speaking always the thought that is uppermost in his mind without reference to persons or

places, I do not know a more genuine, keen-sighted and aspiring human soul. I looked at him for a moment almost with curiosity; so rare is the sight of a man working out his life with eager joy and in entire unconsciousness of himself. His fellow-craftsmen are all talking about his extraordinary work, and the world is fast finding him out; but he remains as simple-hearted as a child. It is this quality quite as much as the genius for expression which I find in him which assures me that he

has the elements of greatness. When he begins to talk, we are always glad to remain silent; such speech as his is rare. A fresher, clearer, more original talker never comes into the Study; his thought flashes to the very heart of the theme, and we see it instantly in some fresh and striking aspect or relation. He is so far removed from the atmosphere of the materialistic spirit that he is as untouched and untainted by it as if it did not exist. Life grows rich under his speech; becomes splendid with interior truth and beauty; becomes marvellously suggestive and inspiring. The commercial standpoint and standards do not enter into his conception of life and the world; the conventional estimates and judgments do not lay a feather's weight on his alert, aspiring spirit. The other day I met him coming away from a rehearsal at which a famous pianist had so thrilled a great audience that the applause more than once broke in on the music. "That man is an artist," said my friend; "did you notice how the crowd irritated him? He hated us because we made him conscious of our presence."

It happened that yesterday Rosalind and I had been looking at an etching of Méryon's, and we had naturally fallen to talking about the pathos of his life; a man of exquisite genius, every touch of whose hand is now precious, but who lived without recognition and died without hope. And as I had seen recently some account of the enormous aggregate value of Corot's works, I recalled also the long years of indifference and neglect through which the great artist waited and worked before fame entered his atelier. When we were comfortably disposed before the fire, and the talk, breaking free from personal incident, began to flow in its accustomed channels, both Méryon and Corot were mentioned by Rosalind as illustrations of the struggle with the world to which some of the greatest souls are subjected; and she added that it was hard to reconcile one's self to the swift success which often comes to lesser men while their superiors are fighting the battle with want and neglect.

"Don't bother about that," said our friend, starting out of his chair and stand-

ing before the fire. "There is nothing that a real artist cares less for than what you call success. It is generally a misfortune if he gets it early, and if it comes to him late he is indifferent to it. It is a misfortune when a man really wants bread and butter and can't get them; when a man is so straitened that he cannot work in peace; but that does not often happen. Most men earn enough to fill their mouths and cover their backs; if they earn more, it generally means that they are throwing away their chances; that the devil of popularity has got their ear and is burying them piecemeal. Neglect and indifference are things which a man ought to pray for, not things to be shunned while one lives and lamented after one is dead. Neglect and indifference mean freedom from temptation, long, quiet days in one's studio, hard work, sound sleep, and healthy growth. It was a great piece of luck for Corot that the world was so long in finding him; that it left him so many years in peace to do his work and let his soul out. His contempt for popularity was well expressed in the phrase, 'Men are like

flies; if one alights on a dish, others will follow.' No happier man ever lived than Corot during those years when there was nothing to do but sit in the fields, pipe in mouth, and watch the morning sky, and then go and paint it. As for Méryon, his case was a hard one; but there was madness in his blood, and, after all, he had the supreme satisfaction of saying his say. He put himself on his plates, and that was enough for any man.

"People are so stupid about this matter of success," he continued, walking up and down the room. "They seem to think a man is miserable unless they crowd his studio. For my part, I don't want them there. Don't you understand that all an artist asks is a chance to work? What we want is not success, but the chance to get ourselves on to canvas. I paint because I can't help it; I am tortured with thirst for expression. Give me expression, and I am happy; deny it, and I am miserable." Here a copy of Keats caught his eye. "It is the same with all of us; there was never a greater mistake than the idea that Keats was unhappy because

critics fell foul of him and the people did n't read him. It is natural to wish that people would see things as we see them, but the chief thing is that we see them ourselves. Keats did n't write for the crowd; he wrote for himself. There was a pain in his soul that could only be eased by writing. When a man writes an 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' he does n't need to be told that he is successful. They talk about Shakespeare's indifference to fame as if it were the sign of a small nature which could not recognise its own greatness. Can't they see that Shakespeare wrote to free his own mind and heart? that before he wrote either play he had conquered in himself the weakness of Hamlet on the one hand, and the weakness of Romeo on the other? Never was a man more fortunate than Shakespeare, for he wrote himself entirely out; he completely expressed himself. I can imagine him turning his back on London and settling down to his small concerns at Stratford with supreme content. What can the world give to or take from the man who has lived his life and put the

whole of it into art? I understand that everybody is reading Browning nowadays; I am surprised they waited so long. I discovered him long ago, and have fed on him ever since, because I felt the eager longing for life and the quenchless thirst for expression in him. No English poet has said such true things about art, because no one else has understood so thoroughly an artist's hunger and thirst, and the things that give him peace." Just at this point, when I was getting into a talking mood myself, our friend stopped suddenly, declared that he had forgotten an engagement, seized his hat and coat, and made off after his customary abrupt fashion.

CHAPTER XIII

ESCAPING FROM BONDAGE

I HAVE often pictured to myself the scene in the old Tower when Raleigh broke the spell of prison life by writing the history of the world. The restless prisoner, a born leader and man of affairs, whose ambitious projects were spread over two continents, was suddenly secluded from the life of his time at the hour when that life had for every daring spirit an irresistible attraction. On the instant this audacious courtier of fortune, ready to take advantage of any wind and strike for any prize, was locked and bolted in the solitude of a cell! Such a man must find vent for his arrested energies, or prey upon himself. If Raleigh could not go to the world, the world must come to him! And it came, not to scorn and triumph over him, but to

submit to the calm scrutiny of his active mind. There have been more striking examples of the victory of a soul over its surroundings; Epictetus made himself free though a slave, and Marcus Aurelius learned how to serve though an emperor; but there has been no more dramatic illustration of the victorious assertion of personality.

The limitations of most lives are by no means so tangible as the walls within which Raleigh was confined, but there is a certain amount of restriction laid on us all. We are all prisoners in some sense; the great man who, of all others, demonstrated most sublimely the superiority of the soul over all external conditions, described himself as "a prisoner of hope." There are fixed limits to the activity of even the freest life; and for many, a narrow field is set both for happiness and for work. There is one place, however, where no boundaries are fixed, no doors closed, no bolts shot: among his books a man laughs at his bonds and finds an open road out of every form of imprisonment. Last night Rosalind read to me, from Silvio

Pellico's Memoirs, pictures of his prison life. His very bondage had furnished material for his pen; out of the barrenness of his prisons he had gathered a harvest of experience and thought. There is no kind of bondage which life lays upon us that may not yield both sweetness and strength, and nothing reveals a man's character more fully than the spirit in which he bears his limitations.

It is an easy matter for the man of many burdens and of sharp restrictions of duty and opportunity to become envious, to rail at fate, and to decry the fortune and work of those who are better circumstanced. It is very easy for such a man to shut his mind and heart within the same walls which confine his body, and to become narrow, hard, and unsympathetic. There are hosts of men who impose their own limitations on the world and set up their own narrowness as the standard of virtue; who identify their own small conceptions of time and eternity with a divine revelation of truth and pronounce all who differ from them anathema. There are few spectacles more common or more

pitiful than these strange illusions by which men mistake their littleness for greatness and the narrow boundaries of their own thoughts and feelings for the outermost bounds and sheer edge of the universe. To be in prison and not be conscious of the bondage is surely a tragic comment on one's ideal of freedom.

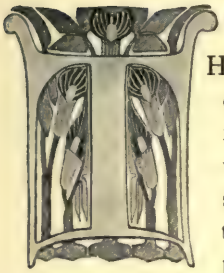
We are all shut up within intangible walls of ignorance, prejudice, half-knowledge; and the difference between men is not the difference between those who are in bonds and those who are free, but between those who feel their bondage and are striving for freedom, and those who, being bound, think themselves loose. The long story of the struggles and agonies and achievements of men is the story of the unbroken effort for freedom; it is the record of countless attempts to break jail and live under God's clear heavens. Hegel declared that the great fact of history is the struggle for freedom, and Matthew Arnold reaffirmed the same thing when he said again and again that the instinct for expansion is at the bottom of the movement of civilisation. It is this

heroic endeavour, often futile, often defeated, but never abandoned, which gives history its dignity and its thrilling interest.

Of the spiritual and intellectual struggles toward light and freedom literature gives the fullest and most authentic account. Great writers have always been in advance of their time, and the impulse toward expression has come largely from the inspiration of escape from some bondage in which other men are held. From Socrates to Browning, the thinkers and poets have all been emancipators. In the end this bringing of new light into the mind of the world will be counted their chief service. "When I am dead," said one of the keenest of modern minds, one of the greatest of modern poets, "lay a sword on my coffin, for I was a soldier in the war for the liberation of humanity." Like service has been rendered by almost all the great writers. They have seen beyond their time; they have parted company with some usage, some tradition out of which the life had ebbed; they have broken away from some decaying creed; they have put some new knowledge in the

place of some old ignorance. The steady movement of great literature is toward the light; and there are few instrumentalities so potent to destroy provincialism, to dissipate popular misconceptions, and to substitute for parochial standards and ideas the larger thought of the larger world of open-minded men. Literature is the hereditary enemy of half-truths, of false perspectives in looking at life, of partial estimates in dealing with men. No man can open his mind to the spirit and teaching of the greatest minds without suffering an enlargement of vision. A man can remain small in a library only by refusing the noble fellowship which lies within his reach; he cannot have companionship with inspiring persons and escape some share in their nobler vision of life.

CHAPTER XIV



SOME OLD SCHOLARS

THE study door is rarely closed. For the most part, it stands open to those vague and wandering sounds which rather serve to convey a sense of companionship than to interrupt thought and dissipate interest. The deepest studies sometimes miss their best results because they are too solitary. The scholar must keep out of the bustle of active life; but if he cross the line of sympathy, if he lose touch with his day and his fellows, there is an end of his usefulness. Nothing interprets a great book or a great picture like human life; it is the only commentary on the growth of art which is worth studying, for in it alone are to be found the secrets and the meaning of art. The scholar must always be

in the best sense a man of the world: one by whom the faces and souls of men are daily read with the insight of sympathy; one to whom the great movement of humanity is the supreme fact to be felt, to be studied, to be interpreted. It is this vital relation to his own age which distinguishes the scholar from the pedant — the man to whom the heart of knowledge reveals itself from the man whose fellowship with the past is always only "dust to dust, ashes to ashes."

It was just this vitality, this living relation to living things, which separated the first great modern scholar from the generations of forgotten Dry-as-Dusts who preceded him. Petrarch really escaped from a sepulchre when he stepped out of the cloister of mediævalism, with its crucifix, its pictures of unhealthy saints, its cords of self-flagellation, and found the heavens clear, beautiful, and well worth living under, and the world full of good things which one might desire and yet not be given over to evil. He ventured to look at life for himself, and he found it full of wonderful power and dignity. He opened

his Virgil, brushed aside the cobwebs which monkish brains had spun over the beautiful lines, and met the old poet as one man meets another; and, lo! there rose before him a new, untrodden, and wholly human world, free from priestcraft and pedantry, near to nature, and unspeakably alluring and satisfying. Digging down through a vast overgrowth of superstition and pedantry, Petrarch found the real soil of life once more, and found that antiquity had its roots there quite as much as mediævalism; that the Greeks and Romans were flesh and blood quite as truly as the image-worshipping Italians. Then came the inevitable thought that these men were not outcasts from the grace and care of heaven, "dead and damned heathen," whose civilisation had been a mere worthless husk to protect the later Christian society, but that they belonged in the divinely appointed order of history, had lived their lives and done their work and gone to their rest as the later generations were doing. The moment Petrarch understood these very simple but then very radical truths his whole attitude toward the

past was changed; it was no longer a forbidden country, but a fresh, untrodden world, rich in all manner of noble activities and experiences, full of character, significance, divinity. There is no need to recall the mighty stirrings of soul that followed; in Humanism the mind had come into fresh contact with life and received a new and overmastering impulse. The new learning ran like fire over Italy; old men forsook their vices for the charms of scholarship, young men exchanged their pleasures for the garb and habits of the student; the air was charged with the electricity of new thought, and all minds turned to the future with a prophetic sense of the great new age on whose threshold they stood.

It was inevitable that in the course of time Humanism itself should become pedantic and formal, should lose its hold upon the turbulent and restless life about it, and should finally give place to a later and still more vital scholarship. Nothing pauses in the sublime evolution of history; there is no place of rest in that pilgrimage which is an eternal truth seeking. It

would be interesting to trace the inner history of the learning which Petrarch and Boccaccio and the men of the great Italian Revival carried through Europe, and to meet here and there some large-minded, noble-hearted scholar, standing book in hand, but always with the windows of his chamber open to the fields and woods, always with the doors of his life open to human need and fellowship. For true scholarship never dies; the fire sometimes passes from one to another in the hollow of a reed, as in the earliest time, but it never goes out. I confess that I can never read quite unmoved the story of the Brethren of the Common Life, those humble-minded, patient teachers and thinkers whose devotion and fire of soul for a century and a half made the choice treasures of Italian palaces and convents and universities a common possession along the low-lying shores of the Netherlands. The asceticism of this noble brotherhood was no morbid and divisive fanaticism; it was a denial of themselves that they might have the more to give. The visions which touched at times the bare walls of

their cells with supernal beauty only made them the more eager to share their heaven of privilege with the sorely burdened world without. Surely Virgil and Horace and the other masters of classic form were never more honoured than when these noble-minded lovers of learning and of their kind made their sounding lines familiar in peasant homes. Among the great folios of the fifteenth century, the very titles of which the modern scholar no longer burdens his memory with, there is one little volume which the world has known by heart these four hundred years and more. Its bulk is so small that one may carry it in his pocket, but its depth of feeling is so great that one never gets quite to the bottom of it, and its outlook is so sublime that one never sees quite to the end of it. The great folios are monuments of patience and imperfect information; this little volume is instinct with human life; a soul speaks to souls in it. It was by no caprice of nature that the "De Imitatione Christi" was written by a member of the Brotherhood of the Common Life. And when the great hour of

deliverance from priestcraft for Germany and Northern Europe came, it was no accident that made another member of the same order the fellow-worker with Luther for liberty of thought. Erasmus was no reformer, but he was a true scholar, and in the splendour of his great attainments and the importance of his great service the obscure virtues of the Brotherhood of the Common Life receive a final and perpetual illumination.

In Kaulbach's striking cartoon of the Reformation there is one figure which no one overlooks, although Shakespeare and Michael Angelo stand in full view. Among the masters of art and literature the cobbler, with his leather apron, finds a place by right of possession which no one of his compeers would dispute. The six thousand compositions of Hans Sachs are for the most part forgotten, with the innumerable poems of the Minnesingers and Meistersingers, but there remain a few verses which the world will not care to forget. In spite of the roughness of his verse, its unmelodious movement, its lack of musical cadence and accent, the cobbler

of Nürnberg lived in the life of his time; he had eyes that looked upon the skies and fields, and a heart that was one with the hearts of his people. It was this vital perception that saved him from slavery to the mechanism of verse and made him a poet in spite of his time and himself. A genuine scholar, and yet a man of the people, Hans Sachs lifts himself out of the mechanical pedantry of his age by the freshness of his contact with life. He might truly have said of himself, as he has said of another:

> "But he — I say with sorrow —
> Is a wretched singer thorough,
> Who all his songs must borrow
> From what was sung before."

No man can live in a "Palace of Art" without danger of missing, not only his own highest development, but that heritage of truth which is always a common and never a personal possession. The poet who separates himself from his fellows reproduces himself by a law which holds him powerless in its grasp; the poet who lives richly and deeply with his kind

The rush of little feet.

learns the secrets of all hearts, and, like Shakespeare, sees the endless procession of humanity passing as he looks into his own soul. The scholar masters the letter and misses the spirit as he sits in unbroken seclusion among his books; the light of common love and joy and sorrow which alone penetrates knowledge to its heart and suffuses bare statement with the soul of truth fades from the page utterly. And so the study door stands open, and intermingling with the great thoughts of the past there comes the sound of voices that break the solitude of life with hope and faith and love, and the rush of little feet that transform it with that thought of eternal youth which is only another word for immortality.

CHAPTER XV

DULL DAYS

IT is a day of mist and rain; a day without light or colour. The leaden sky rests heavily, almost oppressively, on the earth; the monotonous dropping of the rain sets the gray dreariness of the day to a slow, unvarying rhythm. On such a day nature seems wrapped in an inaccessible mood, and one gets no help from her. On such a day it not unfrequently happens that one's spirits take on the colour of the world, and not a flower blooms, not a bird sings, in the garden of the imagination. If one yields to the mood, he puts on the hair shirt of the penitent, and spends the long hours in recalling his sins and calculating the sum total of his mistakes. If one is candid and sensitive, the hours as they pass steadily add to the balance on the

debit side of the account, and long ere the night comes bankruptcy has been reached and accepted as a just award of an ill-spent life. Everybody who has any imagination, and suffers lapses from a good physical condition, knows these gray days and dreads them as visitors who enter without the formality of knocking, and who linger long after the slender welcome which gave them unwilling recognition has been worn threadbare. One cannot wholly get away from the weather even if his mind be of the sanest and his body of the soundest; we are too much involved in the general order of things not to be more or less sympathetic with the atmosphere and sky. There are days when one must make a strenuous effort to be less than gay; there are days when

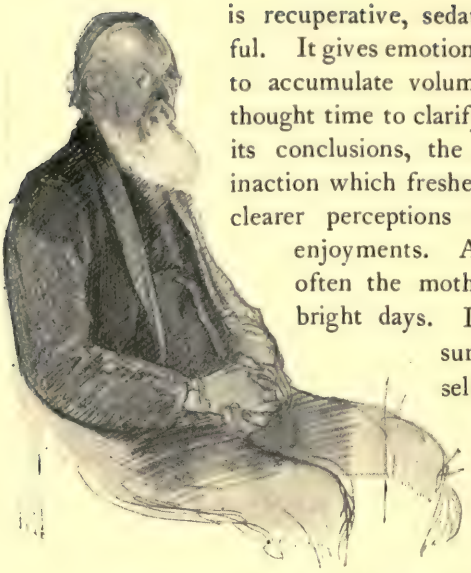
one must make an equally strenuous effort to preserve the bare appearance of cheerfulness.

And yet no man need be the slave of the day; he may escape out of it into the broad spaces of the years, into the vastness of the centuries. There is every kind of weather in books, and on such a day as this one has but to make his choice of climate, season, and sky. Stirring the fire until it throws a ruddy glow on the windows where the melancholy day weeps in monotonous despair, I may open Theocritus, and what to me are the fogs and mists of March on the Atlantic coast? I am in Sicily, and the olive and pine are green, sky and sea meet in a line so blue that I know not whether it be water or atmosphere; the cicada whirs; the birds stir in the little wood; and from the distance come the notes of the shepherd's pipe. All this is mine if I choose to stretch out my hand and open a little book — all this and a hundred other shining skies north and south, east and west. I need not spend a minute with this March day if I choose to open any one of these

countless doors of escape. I know the roads well, for I have often taken them when such mists as these that lie upon the woods and meadows have pressed too closely on my spirits.

But there is something to be learned from a dull day, and the wiser part is to stay and con the lesson. He who knows only brilliant skies has still to know some of the profoundest aspects behind which nature conceals herself. Corot's morning skies stir the imagination to its very depths; but so also do those noble etchings of Van Gravesande which report the blackness of night and storm about the lighthouse and the sombre mystery of the deep woods.

A dull day need not be a depressing day; depression always implies physical or moral weakness, and is, therefore, never to be tolerated so long as one can struggle against it. But a dull day — a day without deep emotions, inspiring thought, marked events; a day monotonous and colourless; a day which proclaims itself neutral among all the conflicting interests of life, is a day to be valued. Such a day



is recuperative, sedative, reposeful. It gives emotion opportunity to accumulate volume and force, thought time to clarify and review its conclusions, the senses that inaction which freshens them for clearer perceptions and keener enjoyments. A dull day is often the mother of many bright days. It is easy to surrender one's self to the better mood of such a day; to accept its repose and reject its gloom. As the hours pass one finds himself gently released from the tension of the work which had begun to haunt his dreams, quietly detached from places and persons associated with the discipline and responsibility of daily occupation. The steady dropping of the rain soothes and calms the restlessness of a mind grown too fixed upon its daily task; the low-lying mists aid the illusion that the world beyond

is a dream, and that the only reality is here within these cheerful walls. After a time this passive enjoyment becomes active, this negative pleasure takes on a positive form. There is something pleasant in the beat of the storm, something agreeable in the colorless landscape. One has gotten rid of his every-day self, and gotten into the mood of a day which discountenances great enterprises and sustained endeavours of every kind. One stirs the fire with infinite satisfaction, and coddles himself in the cosy contrast between the cheerfulness within and the gloom without. One wanders from window to window, lounges in every easy chair, gives himself up to dreams which come and go without order or coherence, as if the mind had given itself up to play. Pleasant places and faces reappear from a past into which they had been somewhat rudely pressed by a present too busy to concern itself with memories; old plans reform themselves, old purposes and hopes are revived; the works one meant to accomplish and abandoned by the way disclose new possibilities of realisation. When the after-

noon begins to darken, one finds that he has gathered from the past many fragments that promise to find completion in some new and sounder form. It has been a day of gleaning, if not of harvesting. As the night descends, fresh fuel renews the smouldering flame, and the past, so quietly, almost unconsciously, recalled, projects itself into the future, and stirs the imagination with a hope that to-morrow may become a purpose, and the day after an achievement.

CHAPTER XVI

THE UNIVERSAL BIOGRAPHY

ALL day long the snow has been whirling over the fields in shapes so varied and so elusive that I have fancied myself present at a dance of phantoms — wandering ghosts of dead seasons haunting the fields which once spread out sunlighted and fragrant before them. At intervals the sun has pierced the clouds and touched the earth with a dazzling brilliancy, but for the most part the winds have driven the storm before them, and at times wrapped all visible things in a white mist of obscurity. On such a day the open fire lights the open book with a glow of peculiar cheer and friendliness; it seems to search out whatever of human warmth lies at the root of a man's thought, and to kindle it with a kindred heat. On such a day the companionable quality of a

book discovers itself as at no other time; it seems to take advantage of the absence of nature to exert its own peculiar charm. In summer the vast and inexhaustible life of nature, audible at every hour and present at every turn of thought, makes most books pallid and meagre. In the universal light which streams over the earth all lights of man's making seem artificial, unreal, and

It is a veritable new world which stretches away white and silent, toward the horizon.

out of place. There are days in summer when the best book affects one as a stage set for the play in broad daylight. But when the days are shortened, and darkness lies on half the dial-plate, the life that is in books takes heart again and boldly claims companionship with the noblest minds.

As I look out of my window I recognise scarcely a feature of last summer's landscape, so universal and so illusive is the transformation which the snow has wrought. It is a veritable new world which stretches away, white and silent, toward the horizon. But this change is not greater than that of which I am conscious as I look within and follow the lines of my books around the walls. These wear a new aspect, and one that appeals to me with a subtle sense of fellowship. Last summer we were casual acquaintances; to-day we are intimate and inseparable friends. It is not only true that there is always a man back of a book, but in every book there is always a part of one's self. The greater a book is, the more familiar it is; we do not stop to weigh its affirmations and conclusions;

we have always known them to be true. A chapter of scientific investigation, a page in a book of mere information, will challenge our criticism and arouse our antagonism; but a book of power, a book which records the dropping of the lead into some fathomless pool of consciousness, commands our assent at once; it simply expresses what we have always known. In summer, nature spreads all manner of nets to beguile us out of ourselves; but when the fires sing to us, their cheerful monotone becomes a softly touched accompaniment to our introspection. The golden milestone in the Roman Forum, from which one could begin his journey to the four quarters of the globe, has its analogue in every man's soul; into whatever part of the universe he would travel, he must start from his own personal consciousness. Our thoughts make highways of the courses which they habitually take when we leave them to themselves, and footpaths along which they loiter when fancy beguiles them unawares into her companionship. But, however the journey be undertaken, or to whatever quarter it

tend, thought always starts from and returns to one's self. It is through our own consciousness that we penetrate the secrets of other experiences and interpret the mystery of the universe.

There is a sense, therefore, in which all the great books are chapters out of our personal history. We read them with a certain sense of ownership; the feeling of a man who comes upon a mechanical device which he long ago hit upon, but never took the trouble to protect by patent. We can never be surprised by any revelation of life or character, because we carry every possible development of these within the invisible realm of our own consciousness. Marlowe's "Tamburlaine" fills us with no astonishment, and the story of the latest hero who died for imperilled humanity stirs our pulses mainly because the swift crisis appeals to our nobility as it appealed to his. How often we chance upon books that seem to be literal transcriptions of our own experiences! It fills us with a sense of discomfort that we should be so well known, that the curtain should have been lifted so ruthlessly upon a past which

we were striving to forget. It is this common consciousness, this participation in a common memory, which keeps us within call of each other in all the great crises of life, and makes our libraries places of confession and penitence. In the world's cathedral at Rome there are confessionals to whose impersonal sympathy appeals may be made in every language spoken by civilized men; but every library is a truer confessional, and a more universal, than St. Peter's. The dome which overarches every collection of great books is nothing less than the infinite sky which stretches over the life of man, and no human soul ever failed to find under it the shrine of its own tutelary saint. Literature keeps the whole race under constant conviction of sin, and there are hours when every man feels like locking his study door, so absolutely uncovered and revealed does his life lie in the speech of some great book.

Shakespeare knew us all so well that one feels the uselessness of any attempt at concealment in his presence; those penetrating eyes make all disguise impossible. He takes little account of our masquerade,

except to sharpen the edge of his irony by a contrast between our pretension and the bare facts of our lives. And this revelation of our inner selves is the core of every book that endures. It is already clear that all the systems of philosophy have had their day, and are fast ceasing to be; and there is every prospect that the scholastic systems of theology are going the same road. The facts of life — divine and human — transcend them all, and their poverty and inadequacy are more and more apparent. The universe is too vast for the girdle of thought; it sweeps away immeasurably, and fades out of imagination in the splendour of uncounted suns. There will be safe paths of knowledge through it for men of reverence and humility, but the old highway of human omniscience is falling into decay. The utmost service of the greatest man is to bring us one step nearer to the truth, not as it lies clear and absolute in the mind of the Infinite, but as it touches, reveals, and sustains this brief and troubled life of ours. Therefore it has been that the poets have done more for the highest truth than the philosophers,

unless the philosophers have also been poets, as has happened now and then since the days of Plato. One turns oftener for inspiration to Wordsworth's ode on "Immortality," or to Browning's "Death in the Desert" or "Saul," than to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" or Spencer's "First Principles."

When I go into the great libraries I am oppressed, not by the mass of volumes packed together under a single roof, but by the complexity and vastness of the life that lies behind them. Books by the hundred thousand have been written to give that life expression, and yet how little has been said that goes to the very heart of existence! When one has read the great books in all literatures, how much still remains unuttered within him!

CHAPTER XVII

A SECRET OF GENIUS

ONE of the tests of greatness is bulk. Mere mass never demonstrated the possession of genius, but men who have borne the stamp of this rare and incommunicable quality have generally been creators on a great scale. One may write a single poem and give it the touch of immortality; a line may linger as long in the ear of the world as an epic or a lyric. But, as a rule, the man who writes one perfect verse adds to it many of a kindred beauty, and he who paints one great picture covers the walls of the gallery. Genius is energy quite as much as insight, and whether it dwell in Shakespeare or in Napoleon, in Michael Angelo or in Gladstone, it is always the mother

of mighty works as well as of great thoughts. Shakespeare, Goethe, Lope de Vega, Molière, Tennyson, Browning, Hugo, Balzac, Scott, Thackeray, fill great space on the shelves of our libraries as well as in our histories of literature. In "Louis Lambert" Balzac describes certain forces, when they take possession of strong personalities, as "rivers of will;" there is an impetus in these potential men which sweeps away all obstacles and rolls on with the momentum of a great stream. In men of genius the same tireless activity, the same forceful habit, are often found; nothing daunts them; nothing subdues them; they make all things tributary to self-expression.

The story of the achievements of Lope de Vega, of Scott, of Balzac, has at times a hint of commerce with magical powers; so difficult is it to reconcile such marvellous fecundity, such extraordinary creative force, with the usual processes of production. Nature has fixed definite boundaries to the activity of most men; there is an invisible line beyond which they seem powerless to go. Upon the man of genius

no such limitations are imposed; if he drains his soul, it is instantly refilled from some invisible fountain. There is something magical about such an achievement as the writing of the "Comédie Humaine," with its eighty and more volumes and its vast community of characters. The physical feat of covering so much paper is no small matter; one does not wonder that Balzac retired to his work-shop with an unwritten romance in his mind and returned with the completed work, worn, exhausted, almost emaciated. Such labors cannot be accomplished save by fasting and self-denial. More than two thousand personalities live and move and have their being in the "Comédie Humaine," and each is carefully studied, vividly realized, firmly drawn. In no actual community of the same number of souls is there anything approaching the distinctness of individuality, the variety and force of character, to be found in these volumes. Pioneers build houses, subdue forests, develop wastes. Balzac did more; he fashioned a world and peopled it. All passions, appetites, aspirations, despairs, hopes, losses, labors,

sufferings, achievements, were known to him; he had mastered them, and he used them as if they were to serve no other purpose than that of furnishing material for his hand. To have looked into the depths of human life with so wide and penetrating a gaze; to have breathed a soul into these abstract qualities; to have clothed them with the habits, manners, characteristics, dress, social surroundings, of actual beings; to have lodged them in country and city — is there any fairy tale so wonderful, any miracle wrought by genie or magician so bewildering? Here, surely, are the evidences of the flow of one of those rivers of will which have more than once transformed society.

One of the secrets of this marvellous fecundity is to keep one's self in the mood and atmosphere in which imagination and heart work as one harmonious and continuous energy. There is an element of inspiration in all great work which is never wholly at command; with the greatest as with humbler men, it ebbs and flows. There are times when it comes in with the rush of the flood; when the mind is

suddenly fertilized with ideas, when the heart is "a nest of singing birds," when the whole visible world shines and glows. There are times, also, when its ebb leaves mind and heart as bare and vacant as the beach from which the tide has receded. These alternations of ebb and flow, of darkness and light, are not unknown to the greatest souls; they are the invariable accompaniments of that quality of soul which makes a man the interpreter of his fellow and of the world which is common ground between them. There is something above us whose instruments we are; there are currents of inspiration which touch us and our strength is "as the strength of ten;" which pass from us and, like Samson shorn, we are as pygmies with other pygmies. No man wholly commands these affluent moods, these creative impulses; but some men learn the secret of appropriating them, of keeping within their range. These are the men who hold themselves with immovable purpose to the conditions of their work; who refuse all solicitations, resist all temptations, to compromise with customary habits and pleas-

ures; who keep themselves in their own world, and, working or waiting, achieve complete self-expression. "I am always at work," said a great artist, "and when an inspiration comes I am ready to make the most of it." Inspiration rarely leaves such a man long unvisited. One looks at Turner's pictures with wonder in his heart. In this rushing, roaring, sooty London, with its leaden skies, its returning clouds and obscuring fogs, how were such dreams wooed and won? The painter's life answers the question. London had small share of Turner; he lived in a world of his own making, and the flush of its sky, the glory of its golden atmosphere, never wholly faded from his vision.

CHAPTER XVIII

BOOKS AND THINGS

ONE of the pleasantest features of life is the unconscious faculty which most things possess of forming themselves into groups, or allying themselves with each other in the most delightful associations. How easy and how agreeable it is to surround one's self with an atmosphere of congenial habits and customs! One awakes in the morning to a day that is no empty house to be explored and warmed and made habitable, but which stretches pleasantly on like a familiar bit of road, with its well-remembered turns and resting-places. It is a delightful prelude to the new day to recall, in a brief review just before rising, the dear faces of the household one is to see again, the sunny rooms

to which one will shortly descend, the open fire before which one will stand while breakfast is being laid, the books still open from last night's reading, the friendly voices soon to be heard on the street, and the accustomed work waiting for one's hand. With such pictures in his mind one rises cheerfully to meet the toils and demands of another working day. The law of association weaves a man's life after a time into a rich and varied texture, in which the sober threads of care and work are interwoven with the soft hues of love and the splendid dyes of imagination; feelings, thoughts, actions, are no longer detached and isolated; they are blended together into the fulness and symmetry of a rich life. One's toil gathers sweetness from the thought of those to whose comfort it ministers; one's books are enriched by the consciousness of the immeasurable life from which they flow as tiny rivulets;

one's friends stand for genius and art and noble achievement; and one's life ceases to be a single strain, and becomes a harmony of many chords, each suggesting and deepening the melody of every other.

Last evening, after dinner, Rosalind, after her usual custom, began playing some simple, beautiful German compositions, to which the children never fail to respond with a merry frolic. When she came to the end of the daily programme, one of the dancers, golden hair all in disorder, pointed

to a page in the open music book, and said: "Mamma, please play that; it always makes me think of 'Baby Bell.'" Happy Mr. Aldrich! Could anything be more delightful than to know that one's verse is associated with music in the mind of a child! The simple request, with its reason, made a deep impression on me; I saw for the first time how early the sense of universal beauty is awake in childhood, and how instinctively it sees that all beautiful things are akin to each other. It was the first page in that sublime revelation of the soul of things through which a man comes at last to see in one vision the flower at his feet and the evening star silvery and solitary on the girdle of the early night, the radiant smile on the face that he loves and the great measureless wealth of sunshine across the summer fields. It is this clear perception of the universal relationship of things which makes a man a scholar instead of a pedant, and turns a library into a place of inspiration and impulse instead of a place of memory and repose.

In my experience the association between books and music is intimate and ever re-

curring. I never hear a certain piece of Haydn's without seeing, on the instant, the massive ranges of the Scottish Highlands as they rise into the still heavens in the pages of Walter Scott's "Waverley;" and there is another simple melody which carries me back to the shipwreck in the "Æneid." Some books seem to have found a more subtle rendering at the hands

of Chopin; and there are others which recall movements in Beethoven's symphonies. For this reason it is a great delight to read with a soft accompaniment of music in another room; there always remains an echo of melody hidden in the heart of thoughts that have come to one under such circumstances, and which gives back its unheard note when they are read again elsewhere. In reading Milton one rarely forgets that the hand which wrote "Paradise Lost" knew the secrets of the organ and could turn them into sound at will.

How many and how rich are the personal associations of books that have gradually been brought together as one needed them for his work, and was drawn there by some personal longing! This book has the author's name written in a characteristic hand on the fly-leaf; between the leaves of its neighbour is hidden a friendly note from the writer, recalling the peculiar circumstances under which it was written; and in this famous novel which lies open before me there is a rose which bloomed last summer across the sea in the novelist's

garden in Surrey. In a place by themselves are six little volumes worn with much reading and with many journeyings. For many years they were the constant companions of one whose hand touched some of the deepest chords of life, and made a music of her own which the world will not soon forget. They speak to me sometimes with the clearness and authority of her own words, so many are the traces which she has left upon them of intimate fellowship. They have been read by the fjords of Norway and the lakes of Italy, and I never open them without feeling the presence of that eager and aspiring spirit to whom every day was an open door to a new truth and a fresh life. Indeed, I am never so near the world as in my study, nor do I ever feel elsewhere the burden and mystery of life coming in upon me with such awful and subduing power. There are hours when these laden shelves seem to me like some vast organ upon whose keys an unseen hand evokes the full harmony of life.

What a magical power of recalling past intellectual experiences familiar books pos-

sess! — experiences that were the beginnings of new epochs in our personal history. One may almost recount the growth of his mind by the titles of great books; the first reading of Carlyle's essay on "Characteristics," of Emerson's "Nature," of Goethe's "Faust," of Coleridge's "Literaria Biographica" — how the freshness and inspiration of those hours of dawning insight come back to one as he turns the well-worn leaves! It used to be regarded as a rare piece of good fortune to have the opportunity of loaning books to Coleridge; the great thinker always returned them with margins enriched with criticisms and comments and references often of far greater value than the text itself. A book so annotated, with the initials S. T. C. on every other page, became thereafter too precious ever to be loaned again. In like manner there are written on the margins of the books we have about us all manner of personal incident and history; no one reads these invisible records but ourselves, but to us they sometimes outweigh the book itself.

CHAPTER XIX

A RARE NATURE

MONG the multitude of books which find their way to the light of my study fire there comes, at long intervals, one which searches my own consciousness to the depths and on the instant compels my recognition of that rare creation, a true work of art. The indefinable atmosphere, the incommunicable touch, of perfection are about and upon it, and one is suddenly conscious of a new and everlasting possession for the race. Such a book lies open before me; it is the "Journal Intime" of Henri Frédéric Amiel. "There is a point of perfection in art," says La Bruyère, "as there is of goodness and ripeness in nature; he who feels and loves it has perfect taste; he who feels it not, and who loves some-

thing beneath or beyond it, has faulty taste." The perfection which I feel in this book is something deeper and diviner than taste; it is a matter of soul, and must therefore remain undescribed. Like the flawless line of beauty, it will instantly reveal itself to those who have the instinct for art, and to those who fail to perceive it at the first glance it will remain forever invisible. There is in some natures a quality of ripeness which makes all the hard processes of growth sweet and, in the general confusion of this workshop stage of life, gives us a sudden glimpse of perfection. Not that Amiel was a man of symmetrical character or life; in neither of these two master lines of action did he achieve anything like complete success; to himself, as to his best friends, he was but a promise, and at his death it seemed as if even the promise had failed. Nevertheless there was in this man of infirm will and imperfect development a quality of soul which must be counted rare at all times, and which, in this present era of bustle and energy, brings something of the surprise of a revelation with it. These

disconnected and unmethodical meditations, extending over a period of thirty-three years, are a kind of subtle distillation of life in which one feels in its finer essence the whole body of modern thinking and feeling. This "Journal Intime" is the sole fruit of a period of time long enough to contain the activities of a whole generation; but how much more significant is the silence of such a book than the articulate speech of great masses of men! It is something that, at the bottom of this great restless ocean of modern life, such a pearl as this lay hid.

Amiel stands for a class of men of genius, of keenly receptive and intensely sensitive temperament; men like Joubert and Maurice de Guérin, whose lives are as rich on the side of thought as they are unproductive on the side of action. Such men teach almost as much through their defects as through their strength. Perhaps it is true that the quality of ripeness one finds in such natures is due to a preponderance of the ideal sufficient to destroy the balance of character. Men of this fibre absorb experience, and produce only scant-

ily, but their production has an unmistakable stamp upon it; they are not interpreters of universal life, but they slowly distil from life a few truths of luminous quality. They recall the profound saying of Alfred de Musset, that it takes a great deal of life to make a little art; the movement of a generation yields them a few meditations, but somehow these seem to open everything up and to make us feel how precious is thought, since such a vast range of action is needed to give it adequate and complete expression. After Napoleon has stormed through Europe and filled the world with the dust and uproar of change, a quiet thinker, living and dying far from the current of events, interprets for us the two or three ideas which gave the sword of the soldier its only significance and dignity.

There are a few eternal elements in life, but these are hidden for the most part by the dust of traffic and travel. Men hurry to and fro in search of truth, and are unconscious that it shines over them with the lustre of a fixed star if they would keep silent for a little, and let the air

clarify itself, and the heavens become visible once more. No life gains its perfect poise without action, but in the exaggerated emphasis laid upon works of hand in this Western world one is often tempted at times by the silent solicitation of the meditative East. There, in the hush of thought, men have always been conscious of their souls, and, if they have fallen into the tideless sea of pantheism, have at least been delivered from the hard and dusty ways of materialism. The just balance of life among us is preserved by such men as Amiel; men who keep apart from crowds and in the perpetual presence of the everlasting verities. There is in such men a wonderful freshness of thought, which makes us conscious of the arid atmosphere in which most of us work and suffocate. Life is old only to those who live in its conventions and formulas; the soil is exhausted only for those whose ploughshare turns the shallow furrow. To all others it is still fresh with undiscovered truth, still inexhaustible in the wealth with which the Infinite Mind has stored it, as the Infinite hand has filled its veins with gold

and its mountains with iron. Amiel's life was not one of those overflowing rivers which make continents blossom as they sweep to the sea; it was rather one of those deep wells which are fed by hidden rills, into which a few stars shine with strange lustre, and which have power to assuage the thirst of the soul.

CHAPTER XX

THE CUCKOO STRIKES TWELVE

"IF Rosalind were here," I said to myself, as I gave the fire a vigorous stirring — "if Rosalind were here, the fire would burn with better heart." Everything takes advantage of Rosalind's absence; the house is less friendly and hospitable, and has become at times neglectful of the soothing ministration of a home to one's unconscious longings for mute companionship; the study has lost something which I cannot define, but the going of which has carried the charm of the place with it; even here the fire, which has been cheerful in all weathers, and set a persistent glow on the front of the sullen days, is sluggish and faint-hearted. "Why should I sing and shine if there is no face to put a halo about?" it

seems to mutter to itself as the sticks fall apart and the blaze smoulders again for the twentieth time. It is a still wintry night, and one cannot resist the mood which bears him on into the silence and solitude of meditation. Without, the lonely stars watch the lonely earth across the abysses of space which nothing traverses save the invisible feet of light. The moon is waning below the horizon which shows yet no silvery token of its coming; the earth sleeps under the ancient spell of winter. One is driven back on himself by a world which, for the time, is as mute as if birds had never sung, nor forest rustled, nor brook prattled. One is driven back upon himself, and finds the society neither stimulating nor agreeable. There are times when one is excellent company for one's self, but not on such a night as this, when the house is deserted, and the fire watches for a chance to go out.

I suspect that the companionship of the open fire is, after all, a negative thing; an accompaniment to which one's own mood furnishes the theme that is always elaborated and expanded. If you are cheerful,

your fire sings to you; if you are overcast, its faint and melancholy glow makes the clouds that encompass more threatening. It rises or sinks with your mood, and its song strikes the major or the minor tone according to the pitch of your thought. The man who can cheerfully "toast his toes" in all weathers will never lack a servile fire to flatter his self-satisfaction. Such a man is always housed against the storm; he is never abroad with the tempests. His little capital of life and love is a buried treasure which will not be lost in any venture; it feeds no large desire, sustains no noble hope, is multiplied into no wealth that may be divided and subdivided until it makes the many rich. The miserly man is of all men the most unlucky when he counts his fortune by the light of the solitary fire. It is all there; he touches every shining piece and knows that it is safe. But where are those greater possessions which yield the priceless revenues of love and happiness? They are gained only by those who make great ventures; who invest all their hope and joy for the sake of the larger return which this inherited wealth, fortunately

invested, secures. It is a great risk; but what large adventure, what splendid achievement, comes unattended with risk? He only is perfectly secure from loss who hoards his treasure until it corrupts itself for want of use. On the other hand, as Lessing has said, he makes noble shipwreck who is lost in seeking worlds. It is

better to go down on the great seas which human hearts were made to sail than to rot at the wharves in ignoble anchorage. It is far better to put one's whole life into some noble venture of love or service than to sit at home with slippered feet always on the fender.

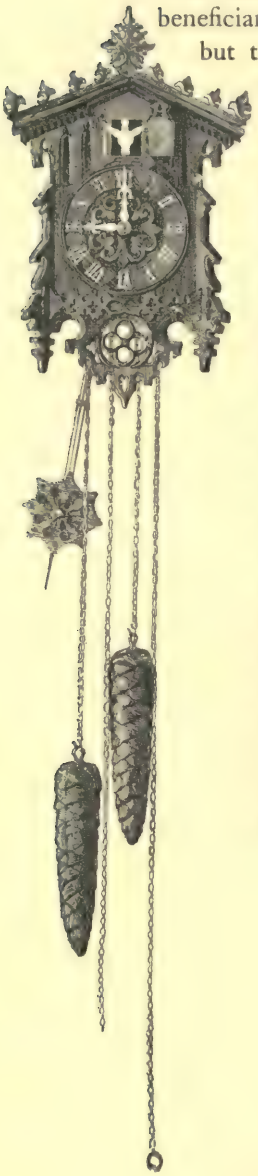
"If Rosalind were here," I said to myself again, "this fire would surely need less frequent stirring." When I laid the poker down and settled myself for further meditation, the blaze suddenly kindled and brought the whole room into cheerful relief. In the ruddy light my eyes caught the title of a famous book whose pages are often open in my hand. It was like coming unexpectedly upon a friend when one thought one's self alone. I took it from its place and let it fall open upon my knee, where the dancing light wove arabesques of gold about the text, as the monks in the scriptorium once intertwined the black letter with the glory of bird and flower. It was a wonderful book which lay there open to the fire; a book which is "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a

life beyond life;" a book deep almost as thought and great almost as life. I did not read the lines that were clearly legible on my knee; the great book seemed to speak its whole message without words. I recalled the story of the man that wrote it; I followed him step by step through his stormy and arduous life; I remembered all his losses and sacrifices; I understood as never before the completeness of his self-surrender. He had been a world-seeker; he had missed the lower comforts of life; for him the alien stars had burned, but not the cheerful fire of unadventurous ease. Had he made shipwreck? If he had, his going down had strewn the shores of all time with a wreckage so precious that it had made the whole world rich. This man had put his whole life of happiness into two great ventures; he had risked all for love, and again he had risked all for the city that bore him; and his was a double loss. Of his splendid fortune of personal happiness there remained but a beatific vision and a lifelong devotion scorned and rejected. Surely it were better to live at ease with one's self and one's fire than

tempt fortune thus! But then, I thought, are not the man and the book and the vision and the great life to be reckoned in the full accounting? Out of the bitter root of personal loss and sorrow these immortal flowers have bloomed!

"If Rosalind were here," I said to the fire, which was now burning cheerfully, "she would show us the heart of this matter." And as I fell to thinking about her again, I saw how manifold are the workings of the law that man must lose his life if he would find it, must give himself if he would really possess himself. I recalled one by one the books that had spoken to me in the crises of my life, or had been my companions when the road ran straight and sunny before me, and I understood that, one and all, these were the returns from great ventures, the rewards of great risks. I saw that these great spiritual and intellectual treasures had been gotten on many shores, plucked from the depths of many seas; that no man is ever rich enough to divide with his fellows or bequeath to posterity unless he puts his heart into some great affection, and his

whole thought into some great enterprise. The men who sit at home have neither beneficiaries nor heirs; they possess nothing but their poverty, and that vanishes with them when death makes up the impartial account. After all, I said to myself, no one is ever poor who has once been rich; for the real return of a great venture is in the expansion and enrichment of one's own nature; and that cannot fly from us as the shy bird happiness so often escapes into the upper sky whence it came to build its fragile nest in our hearts. To have done some great service and felt the thrill of it, is enough to remember when the hour is passed and the deed forgotten; to have poured one's whole life into some great affection is never to be impoverished again. After the beautiful face became first a beautiful memory and then a heavenly vision, the poet was never again alone; in all his arduous wanderings there was with



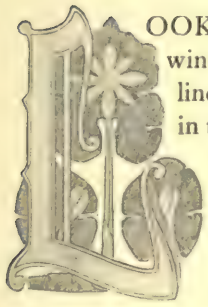
him one whose footfall in Paradise all the world has listened to hear. Love is the only synonym in any earthly speech for immortality; it has no past, for it carries all that it has been in its heart; and it has no future, for it already realises its own completeness and finality. To have seen once the heart of a pure, loyal, and noble nature is to have gained an imperishable possession.

Just then the silence in which I sat was broken; the cuckoo flew out of his little door and chaunted twelve cheerful notes. "It makes all the difference in the world," I said to myself, "how you report the flight of time. You may have a hammer ring the hours for you on hard and resonant metal, or you may cage a bird and set the years to music." And I remembered how long that tiny song had broken on my ears; how it had blended with the first thrilling, articulate cry of life, and how it had kept record of hours of great agonies and joys. Through the darkness as the light, its cheerful song had set the days and years to an impartial music. Did I dream then, as I listened, before the dying

fire, to the echoes of the vanished years, that a bird flew out of Paradise, and, alone of all the heavenly brood, returned no more, but built its nest along the ways of men, seeking always for one to whom its divine song should be audible; and that, having heard that thrilling note, the chosen ones heard no other sound, but followed whithersoever the song led them, and knew that at the end it would not die out in the evening sky! "If Rosalind were here," I said to the fire as I covered the warm coals for the night — "if Rosalind were here —"

CHAPTER XXI

A GLIMPSE OF SPRING



OOKING out of the study windows this morning, Rosalind noticed a sudden change in the group of willows on the hill. There was a tinge of fresh colour in the mass of twigs which we recognised as the earliest harbinger of spring. In the sky there was a momentary softness of tone which turned the dial of thought forward on the instant, and we waited expectant for the reedy note that should tell us of the coming of the birds and the freshness of the early summer on the woods and hills. The illusion lasts but a moment, for the March winds are rising, and the gray clouds will soon overshadow the sky. But fancy has been loosened, and will not return to its wonted subjection to the work

of the day. The subject one is studying is flat, stale, and unprofitable ; one no sooner settles down to it than the fragrance of the apple blossom, borne from some silent field of memory or from some sunny orchard of the imagination, turns all the eager search for knowledge into ashes. When such a mood comes, as come it will when prophecies of spring are abroad, it is better to yield to the spell than to make a futile resistance.

There is a volume close at hand which fits the day and the mood. It is Richard Jefferies's "Field and Hedgerow," the last word of one through whose heart and hand

so much of the ripe loveliness of the English summer passed into English speech. One has but to open its pages and he finds himself between the blossoming hedges waiting for that thrilling music which lies hidden with the nightingale in the copse. I give myself up to the spell of this beautiful book, and straightway I am loitering in the wheat fields; I cross the old bridge where the once busy wheel has grown decrepit and moss-covered with age; I stroll through the deer park, shaded by venerable oaks; I pause at last in the old village where the repose and quaintness of an earlier and more rustic age still linger. Every flower, every grass, every tree, every bird, is known to my companion; and he knows, also, every road and by-path. Nothing escapes his eye, nothing eludes the record of his memory: "Acres of perfume come on the wind from the black and white of the bean field; the firs fill the air by the copse with perfume. I know nothing to which the wind has not some happy use. Is there a grain of dust so small the wind shall not find it out? Ground in the mill-wheel of the centuries,

the iron of the distant mountain floats like gossamer, and is drank up as dew by leaf and living lung. A thousand miles of cloud go by from morn till night, passing overhead without a sound; the immense packs, a mile square, succeed to each other, side by side, laid parallel, book-shape, coming up from the horizon and widening as they approach. From morn till night the silent footfalls of the ponderous vapours travel overhead, no sound, no creaking of the wheels and rattling of the chains; it is calm at the earth; but the wind labours without an effort above, with such ease, with such power. Gray smoke hangs on the hillside where the couch-heaps are piled, a cumulus of smoke; the wind comes, and it draws its length along like the genii from the earthen pot; there leaps up a great red flame, shaking its head; it shines in the bright sunlight; you can see it across the valley."

But, as I read, the moving world about me grows vague and indistinct; I find myself thinking more and more of my companion. What a glance is his which sweeps the horizon and leaves no stir of

life unnoted; which follows the bird in its flight and detects the instinct which builds its nest and evokes its song; which searches the field and records every change in the tiny flower of the grass! How spacious must be the mind, how full the heart, how self-centred the life, when one matches with the immeasurable beauty of the world the genius which searches the heart of it all! This man surely must see his own way clear, must hold his own course without doubt or question, must need no aid of human recognition, while his eye sees with such unerring clearness and his heart beats with the heart of nature herself! Was it so with Jefferies? I turn from the book and recall the story of his long, heroic struggles with poverty, ending at last in a great agony of disease and death. Not quite three years ago he wrote: "I received letters from New Zealand, from the United States, even from the islands of the Pacific, from people who had read my writings. It seemed so strange that I should read these letters, and yet all the time be writhing in agony." "With truth I think I may say that there are few,

very few, perhaps none, living who have gone through such a series of diseases. There are many dead — many who have killed themselves for a tenth part of the pain; there are few living." And a friend has written of him: "Who can picture the torture of these long years to him, denied as he was the strength to walk so much as one hundred yards in the world he loved so well? What hero like this, fighting with Death face to face so long, fearing and knowing, alas! too well, that no struggles could avail, and, worse than all, that his dear ones would be left friendless and penniless? Thus died a man whose name will be first, perhaps forever, in his own special work." I turn to the last words written by his pen three years ago this spring: "I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me; how they manage, bird and flower, without ME, to keep the calendar for them. . . . They go on without me, orchis-flower and cowslip. I cannot number them all. I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet — flower and buds, and the beautiful clouds that go over, with the sweet rush of rain and burst

of sun-glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strew the sward of the hill." He has told the heart of his story in a sentence: "Three great giants are against me: disease, despair, and poverty."

These terrible words, in which the uttermost agony of a human soul speaks, blot out for the moment the vision of fair fields and golden weather; and one closes the book and falls to thinking. The story is an old one; it has been told of many a great heart whose work freights these cases with the weight of immortal thought; and it is the consciousness that these teachers and singers, these strong, unconquerable spirits, these loyal, aspiring souls, have shared with us the common lot of men, have suffered and despaired with the great army of humanity, which gives their works sustaining power. These books, in which we read the story of our own lives, were not the work of demi-gods secluded from the uncertainty and bitterness of human fortune in some serene world of art; our weaknesses, our irresolution, our temptations, our blindnesses and misgivings, were

theirs also. And if they have held to the truth of their visions and the reality of their ideals, it has not been because they escaped the common lot, but because they held their way through it with unshaken resolution. Genius does not separate its possessors from their fellows; it makes them the more human by its power to uncover the deeps of experience, to unlock the innermost chambers of the heart, to enter into all that life is and means, not only to one's self but to humanity. No human soul that comes to full self-knowledge escapes the penalty of growth into truth and power: the penalty of pain, of doubt and uncertainty, of misconceptions of spirit and purpose; of bitter struggle to make hard facts the helpers in the search and strife for freedom and fulness of life; of long waiting; of the sense of loneliness among one's fellows; of the slow achievement through faith and patience.

It has been said that the pathos of antique life lay in the contrast between the beauty of the world and man's few and broken years; and that the pathos of mediæval life lay in the contrast between

the same beauty become a manifold temptation, and the soul of man, a stranger amid its shows and splendours, lodged in a cell while the heavens were blue, scourged and fasting while birds and wind sang the universal song of joy and freedom. The pathos of all time and life is the contrast between the illimitable thirst and the unsatisfying draught, between the flying ideal and the lagging real, between the dream and the accomplishment, between aspiration and capacity and power on the one hand, and change, limitation, disease, and death on the other. Literature knows this pathos but too well; the pathos to which no great soul and no great life is ever alien.

The book has long since slipped from my hand, and a sombre shadow seems to have quenched the glow of the fire. Out of the window the world lies cold and cheerless; bitter winds are abroad; the leaden sky is hidden by a flurry of snow. Winter is supreme everywhere. But the faint colour on the willows silently speaks of softer skies and golden weather.

CHAPTER XXII

A PRIMEVAL MOOD

THE early spring days come freighted with strange, vague longings; there is in them some subtle breath of the unconfined, universal life-spirit, which fills us with a momentary antagonism to all our habits, customs, and occupations, and inspires us with a desire to be free of all obligations, duties, and responsibilities. The primitive lawlessness in our blood seems to stir dimly with the first movements of life under the sod and within the silence of the woods. Some long-forgotten existence, antedating all our institutions and the very beginnings of society, is dimly reflected in the depths of consciousness, and makes us restless with desire to repossess ourselves of a lost knowledge, to recover a whole

epoch of primitive experience faded to the vaguest of shadows in the memory.

I am not sure that Rosalind will enter into this mood, or that, if she should, she would think it profitable or helpful. I keep it to myself, therefore; feeling quite safe, within the circle of light which falls from the shaded lamp about her, from all heathenish and uncivilised impulses. Indeed, I think it would be better if we could feel, amid our intense activities to-day, a little more of the pulse of the free and trustful life which lies like a forgotten page at the beginning of the great volume of human history. Progress and civilisation are normal, healthful, inevitable; it takes very little knowledge and thought to detect the fundamental error in Rousseau's theories of the natural state of man, or in the occasional play of intellectual wilfulness which declares for barbarism as more normal and noble than civilisation. Nevertheless, there are certain things which men are likely to lose in the swift movement of modern life which have always been among their best possessions. Freshness of perception, a sensitive mental retina, openness to the

unobtrusive but wonderfully significant procession of star and flower and storm-cloud — these are among the precious things which men have largely lost by the way. The intense introspection of modern life has given us a marvellously rich literature of subjective observation and meditation; but we are in danger of missing the freshness, the joy, the poetic impressiveness of the world that lies within the empire of the senses. This thought was in Wordsworth's mind when he wrote that profound and moving sonnet:

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours
And are up-gather'd now like sleeping flowers —
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn,

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn."

The note of revolt in these striking lines is not unfamiliar to men and women in whom the poetic mood survives and at times asserts itself with the momentary tyranny of a king who has forgotten that he is dethroned. In every healthful nature there must be an outlet into the ancient life of fresh impressions, of senses still unsubdued to the work of the calculating intellect, of impulses still vigorous with unspent vitality. It is to satisfy this craving than some men find themselves drawn irresistibly at times to the Odyssey, with its free, fresh life of movement and action; it is because the great race legends of the Scandinavian, the German, and the Celt have this breath of the morning upon them that they take possession of the imagination and stir such vague but passionate responses within us. It is to satisfy this craving, no doubt, that a young poet now and then

gives rein to his imagination, and celebrates his freedom in verse better suited to Bacchic and other lost pagan moods than to modern ears; and, recalling the exuberant vitality of such a youth as Goethe's before it had learned that obedience is the only road to freedom, we are not surprised to hear him say to Merck in the early Weimar days: "We are somewhat mad here, and play the devil's own game."

While I had been letting my thoughts run in this riotous fashion Rosalind had been intently reading Maurice de Guérin. Suddenly she looked up from the book and read aloud some striking sentences from that exquisite piece of poetic interpretation, the "Centaur." The old Centaur is telling the story of his wonderful early life, with its seclusion, its unfettered freedom, its kinship with nature, its nearness to the gods. There is in the story a deep sincerity, a simplicity, a strange familiarity with the secrets and mysteries of nature, which never cease to touch me as a kind of new power in literature. The Centaur describes his wild, far wanderings through the deep valleys and along the mountain

summits until the evening shadows begin to fill the recesses of the remoter hills. "But when Night, filled with the charm of the gods, overtook me on the slopes of the mountain, she guided me to the mouth of the caverns, and there tranquillised me as she tranquillises the billows of the sea. Stretched across the threshold of my retreat, my flanks hidden within the cave, and my head under the open sky, I watched the spectacle of the dark. The sea gods, it is said, quit during the hours of darkness their places under the deep; they seat themselves on the promontories, and their eyes wander over the expanse of the waves. Even so I kept watch, having at my feet an expanse of life like the hushed sea. My regards had free range, and travelled to the most distant points. Like sea beaches which never lose their wetness, the line of mountains to the west retained the imprint of gleams not perfectly wiped out by the shadows. In that quarter still survived, in pale clearness, mountain summits naked and pure. There I beheld at one time the god Pan descend ever solitary; at another, the choir of the mystic divinities; or I saw

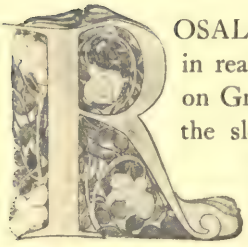
some mountain nymph charm-struck by the night. Sometimes the eagles of Mount Olympus traversed the upper sky, and were lost to view among the far-off constellations, or in the shade of the dreaming forests."

I cannot describe the eloquence of these words as Rosalind read them, with rising colour and deepening tone; the eloquence of the imagination narrating the past, and making its most wondrous forms live again. The secret of the Centaur perished with him, but not the charm of his life. The wild, free range of being, with vision of descending deities and spell-bound nymphs; the fellowship with mighty forces that science has never tamed; the sway of impulses that rise out of the vast unconscious life of nature — these still penetrate at times our habits and occupations, and find our hearts fresh and responsive. It is then that we draw away from men for a season, and become one of those of whom the same wise Centaur said that they had "picked up on the waters or in the woods, and carried to their

lips, some pieces of the reed pipe thrown away by the god Pan. From that hour these mortals, having caught from their relics of the god a passion for wild life, or perhaps smitten with some secret madness, enter into the wilderness, plunge among the forests, follow the course of the streams, bury themselves in the heart of the mountains, restless, and haunted by an unknown purpose."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE METHOD OF GENIUS



OSALIND had been so absorbed in reading Mr. Lowell's essay on Gray that she had not noted the slow sinking of the fire; it was only when she had finished that noble piece of criticism and laid aside the volume that she became suddenly conscious of her lapse of duty, and began to make vigorous reparation for her oversight. For a moment the flame crept cautiously along the edges of the wood; and then, taking heart from glowing fellowship, suddenly burst into full blaze and answered the roaring wind without with its own note of defiance. I sat quietly behind my desk, enjoying the various charming pictures, framed in mingled light and shadow, which Rosalind's struggle with the fire seemed to

project into the room. I am sure that the charm is in her, and that the illusive play of imagination, the soft and wandering glow touching now a book and now a picture, the genial warmth which pervades the place, are really a subtle materialisation of her qualities. For me at least, the fire loses its gentle monotone of consolation when her face is not transfigured by it, and I enjoy it most when I feel most deeply that it is but a symbol of that which she has added to my life.

I was saying that Rosalind had been reading Mr. Lowell's essay on Gray. When she had stirred the smouldering flame into a blaze, she opened the book again and read aloud here and there a luminous criticism, or one of those perfect felicities of style which thrill one as with a sudden music. When she had finished she said, with a half-sigh: "I am sure there can be but one pleasure greater than the reading of such a piece of work, and that is the writing of it. Why does it kindle my imagination so powerfully? why does it make everything I have read lately seem thin and cold?"

There is a soft glow on her face as she asks this question, which I cannot help thinking is the most charming tribute ever paid even to Mr. Lowell, a writer fortunate beyond most men of genius in the recognition of his contemporaries. The question and the face tempt me away from desk and

my task, and invite me to the easy-chair from whence I have so often studied the vagaries of the restless fire. Rosalind's question goes to the very heart of the greatest of the arts, and has a personal interest because she takes as her text one of the best known and best loved of the friends whose silent speech make this room eloquent. The second series of "Among My Books" lies on the desk at my hand, and as I open it at random the eye falls on these words from the essay on Dante: "The man behind the verse is far greater than the verse itself, and the impulse he gives to what is deepest and most sacred in us, though we cannot always explain it, is none the less real and lasting. Some men always seem to remain outside their work; others make their individuality felt in every part of it — their very life vibrates in every verse, and we do not wonder that it has 'made them lean for many years.' The virtue that has gone out of them abides in what they do. The book such a man makes is indeed, as Milton called it, 'the precious life-blood of a master spirit.' Theirs is a true immortality, for it is their

soul, and not their talent, that survives in their work."

"There," I said, "is the answer to your question from the only person who can speak with authority on that matter. What you feel in that essay on Gray, and what I always feel in reading Lowell, is not the skill of a marvellously trained hand, but the movement of a large, rich nature to whom life speaks through the whole range of experience, and who has met that constant inflow of truth with a quiet nobleness of mind and heart. Mr. Lowell seems to me pre-eminently the man of genius as distinguished from the man of talent; the man, that is, who holds heart and mind in close, unconscious fellowship with the whole movement of life, as opposed to the man who attempts to get at the heart of these things by intellectual dexterity. The great mass of writing is done by men of talent, and that is the reason why this account of Gray makes what you have been reading lately seem cold and thin. There is in this essay a vein of gold of which Mr. Lowell is perhaps unconscious; it is the presence of his own

nature which gives his piece of criticism that indescribable quality which every human soul recognises at once as a new revelation of itself.

"The man of talent is simply a trained hand, a dexterity which can be turned at will in any direction; this is the kind of literary faculty which abounds just now, and is so sure of itself that it denies the very existence of genius. The man of genius, on the other hand, is a large, rich nature, with an ear open to every whisper of human experience, and a heart that interprets the deepest things to itself before they have become conscious in the thought. The man of genius lives deeply, widely, royally; and the best expression he ever gives of himself is but a faint echo of the world-melodies that fill his soul. When such a man writes, he does not draw upon a special fund of information and observation; the universe of truth lies about him, and rises like an inexhaustible fountain within him. One feels in the work of such a man as Lowell the presence, to use Ruskin's phrase, not of a great effort, but of a great force. There is no suggestion

of limitation, no hint that one has reached the end of his resources; on the contrary, there is present the indefinable atmosphere of an opulent nature, whose wealth is equal to all draughts, and whose capital remains unimpaired by the greatest enterprises. Shakespeare was not impoverished by 'Hamlet,' nor Goethe by 'Faust.' 'To be able to set in motion the greatest subjects of thought without any sense of fatigue,' says Amiel, 'to be greater than the world, to play with one's strength — this is what makes the well-being of intelligence, the Olympic festival of thought.' "

The fire, which had been burning meditatively during this discourse, sank at this point into a bed of glowing coals, and I took breath long enough to replenish it with a fresh stick or two. Rosalind meanwhile had taken up her sewing.

"Don't you believe, then, in an art of literature apart from life?" she asked.

"To begin with," I answered, "there is no such thing as a separation of art from life; it is modern misconception which not only separates them, but sets them in

contrast. A true art is impossible apart from life; the man of genius always restores this lost harmony. The man of talent divorces his skill from life, the man of genius subordinates his training to the truth which speaks through him. To him art is not mere skill, but that perfect reproduction of ideal life which the world gains when Pheidias gives it the Olympian Zeus, Raphael the Sistine Madonna, and Dante the Divine Comedy. Mr. Lowell is the greatest of our poets because his trained hand moves in such subtle harmony with his noble thought. He wears 'all that weight of learning lightly as a flower.' The impulses of a man of genius come from life; they are deep, rich, vital; they rise out of the invisible depths of his consciousness as the unseen mists rise out of the mighty abyss of the sea; and as the clouds take form and become the splendour and the nourishment of toiling continents, so do these impulses become distinct and articulate, and touch life at last with an indescribable beauty and strength. On the other hand, the impulses of a man of talent spring from skill, knowledge, the desire

and profit of the moment. The deepest truth is not born of conscious striving, but comes in the quiet hour when a noble nature gives itself into the keeping of life, to suffer, to feel, to think, and to act as it is moved by a wisdom not its own. The product of literary skill is a piece of mechanism — something made and dexterously put together in the broad light of the workshop; the work of genius is always a miracle of growth, hidden from all eyes, nourished and expanded by the invisible forces which sustain the universe."

At this point I became suddenly conscious that my hobby was in full canter, and that Rosalind might be the unwilling spectator of a solitary race against time.

"My dear," I said, "your question must bear the responsibility of this discourse. There are some names so rich in associations with one's intellectual life, so suggestive of the best and truest things, that they have a kind of a magical power over our minds; they are open sesames to about all there is in us."

CHAPTER XXIV

A HINT FROM THE SEASON

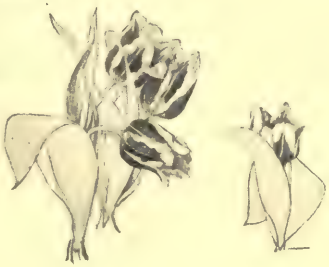
THIS afternoon, when Rosalind came in from her walk, she brought an indefinable atmosphere of spring with her. I was not surprised when she said that she had seen a bluebird; I should hardly have been surprised if she had told me the summer was at our doors, and the fire must go out that the hearth might be swept and garnished. There are times when prophecy is swiftly fulfilled by the imagination, and turns into history under our very eyes. For days past there have been harbingers of change on every hand; and fancy, taking the clues so magically dropped here and there in field and sky, travels with swift flight onward to the songs and flowers of June. This evening

the season has wrought its spell upon us; and while we have listened to the winds of March, and watched the shifting outlines of the fire, our thoughts have caught something of the glow of summer. Rosalind has had various house-cleaning plans running through her mind, no doubt, but she has kept them to herself. I believe in the sharing of cares, but I admire, above all things, the loving skill which reserves the common problems of the household for some fit hour, and keeps the evening intact for sweeter and more inspiring fellowship. I sometimes wonder if a good many women do not lose that touch of sentiment which is the fragrance of domestic life, by keeping the machinery too con-

The supreme charm of a woman is her atmosphere.

stantly within sight and hearing; the whir of the wheels must be deadened if the fireside is to hear the best talk, and to cast its magical glow on the most complete companionship. The supreme charm of a woman is her atmosphere; and how shall that be serene and sunny, touching the life of the home with indefinable colour and fragrance, if problems and perplexities are not kept well in the background? The women whose presence is both rest and inspiration are not as numerous as they might be if the secret of their charm were told abroad. This is a digression, but, in the ramble, what moments are so delightful as those in which we stray from the road to pluck a wild flower, or to find a fairer outlook?

"I am not sure," said Rosalind, "that I should care for perpetual sunshine. One values a beautiful thing most when it appeals to a fresh perception of its charm. I don't believe I should enjoy summer half so much if it were always at hand."



I was thinking the same thought, but with a different application. I had just been reading one of those perverse writers who are always sure that their own age is the worst in all history, and their own country the most depraved in the world. If they would only add that they themselves were the most misleading of writers, I could offset the truth of the last statement against the falsehood of the other propositions, and feel that something had been gained. The particular prophet to whose monody I had been giving a few moments of half-hearted attention had assured me that we have come to the end of poetry and all great work of the imagination, and have entered upon a period of final decadence. All noble dreams of idealism have faded, and a dull gray sky is henceforth to overarch life and leave it cold and colourless. This pessimistic note is familiar to all readers of modern books; they have heard it in all keys, and with all the varied modulations of literary skill. Renan has sung the swan-song of the noble idealism of the past in his limpid and beguiling French periods, and English

and American pens have taken up the burden of the refrain and set it to a varied and seductive music. The swan-song has become to many sensitive spirits a veritable siren melody, luring them away from all noble effort and action. These thoughts were in my mind as I gave the fire an energetic stirring to express my deep and growing aversion to the gospel of disillusion which is fast substituting for the prophetic dream of the imagination the nightmare of despair.

"I do not understand," I said, as I sank back into my easy-chair, "why men who write books will not occasionally look out of the windows of their libraries and take note of the bluebirds and the gleams of softened sky. We happen just now to be in a period of comparative barrenness in poetry. We have had within this present century a golden summer of marvellous fertility; one has to go back a good many seasons to recall another so prodigal of colour, so full of all manner of noble fruitage. There has followed a softened but beautiful autumn, the aftermath of a cloudless day; and now has come the

inevitable winter of pause, silence, and apparent barrenness. Straightway the older men, recalling the glorious days of their youth, fall to moaning over the final disappearance of summer; and some of the younger men, chilled by the season and unable to rekindle the torches that have burnt out, join in the tragic chorus, and give themselves to the writing of epitaphs of classical perfection of form and more than classical coldness of temper. There are times when one feels as if most recent poetry had been written solely for mortuary purposes. The chill of death is on it; one's only consolation in reading it springs from the conviction that it is written over an empty tomb; and it must be confessed that grief has a hollow sound, even in verse of classical correctness, when one knows that the death which it laments with elegiac elegance has not actually taken place. For myself, I confess I am so weary of the funeral note of recent verse that I have gone back to Shakespeare with an almost rapacious appetite. An evening on Prospero's Island, with Ariel hovering in mid-air, the invisible messenger

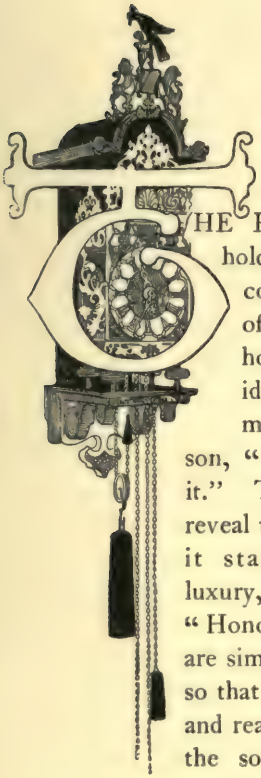
of that Imagination which his master embodies, gives me back the old harmonies of hope and joy and life. The music of the sea that sings round that island is heard by few mariners in these melancholy days. It is significant that the greatest writers are never despondent or despairing. Such men as Homer and Shakespeare and Goethe were serene and joyous in a world whose deeper mysteries were far more real and pressing to them than to the minor singers of to-day. The trouble is not in the age, but in the men. The man who cannot be strong, cheerful, creative, in his own age, would find all other ages inhospitable and barren."

Here I saw that Rosalind was about to speak, if she could get the opportunity, and I generously gave it to her.

"I quite agree with you," was her agreeable comment; "but what did you mean by saying at the beginning that writers ought to look out of their library windows oftener?"

"I 'm glad you reminded me of my text," I answered. "The point of what I have been saying was in that remark.

In the world of thought, imagination, and feeling, seed-time and harvest are ordained quite as distinctly as in the world of fruits and flowers. There are epochs of splendid fertility, and there are epochs of sterility. It is by no accident that one age is silent and the next flooded with melody. The tide of creative impulse ebbs and flows under a law which has not been discovered; but the return of the tide is no less certain than its ebb. Why, then, should men of talent wander up and down a beach from which the waters have receded, wringing their hands and adding a hollow moan to the mighty monotone of the sea because the tide will return no more? More than once, in other and parallel ages, these melancholy cries have been drowned by the incoming tides. Life is inexhaustible, and he must be blind indeed who does not see in the movements of to-day the possibilities of a future in which art shall come nearer than ever to human hearts, and add to its divine revelation of beauty some undiscovered loveliness."



CHAPTER XXV

A BED OF EMBERS

THERE is no event in the household life so momentous as the coming of a friend; it is one of the events for which the home was built and in which its ideal is realised. "The ornament of a house," says Emerson, "is the friends who frequent it." Their character, culture, aims, reveal the law of its being; whether it stands for show, for mere luxury, or for large and noble living. "Honour to the house where they are simple to the verge of hardship; so that there the intellect is awake and reads the laws of the universe, the soul worships truth and love, honour and courtesy flow into all deeds." How easy it is to collect handsome furniture and crowd a house to suffocation with

things which give one no impression of individuality, but only an impression of expense! Elaborate homes abound in these days, but for the most part they serve mainly to emphasise the vulgarity of the people who inhabit them; an elegant house is a dangerous possession for those whose social training has not prepared them for it. Such homes are not without their advantages to the children who grow up in them, but the elders are always out of place in them. The real charm of a home is the indefinable atmosphere which pervades it, made up of the personalities who live in it, of the friends who frequent it, of the pictures which hang upon its walls, the books which lie upon its tables, and all its furnishings which disclose taste, training, and character. Many elegant houses impress one with a painful materialism; even when all things are in keeping there is an elaboration which offends the mind by making too much of bodily comfort and mere physical luxury. The highest intellectual and social types are not likely to be developed in such an atmosphere; Attic rather than Asiatic

influences have inspired the finest social life. The first and final impression of a house should come, not from furniture, but from those material things which stand for thought, for beauty, for the ideal. I should shrink from creating a home which people should remember for its ministration to their bodies; that kind of service can be bought at the inn; I should count myself fortunate if my home were remembered for some inspiring quality of faith, charity, and aspiring intelligence. One cannot write about his own home without egotism, for it is the best part of himself. If I were to write about mine, as I fear I am constantly doing, I should simply write about Rosalind. When I think of what home is and means, I understand the absolute veracity of Lowell's sentiment that "many make the household, but only one the home." In every home there is one whose nature gives law and beauty to its life; who builds it slowly out of her heart and soul, adorns it with the outward and visible symbols of her own inward and spiritual gifts, and makes it her own by ministrations not to be weighed and counted, so

impalpable, so numberless, and so beyond all price are they. But of the friends who pull one's latch-string and sit before one's fire one may speak without offence and with infinite satisfaction to himself; the coming and going of those who know and love us best form the most inspiring records in the domestic chronicles.

Last night the study fire burned late; or rather we sat by it so late that it was only a bed of embers. What a glow came from it, and what heat! The blaze of the earlier evening yielded nothing so grateful, so beautiful, so full of appeal to the memory and the imagination. We lingered long, and with deepening joy and gratitude; we seemed to pause for an hour between a past rich in memories and a future affluent in hopes. We waited for our friend to speak, and every time her voice broke the silence it seemed to recall some half-forgotten phase of a life set to pure and beautiful ends, some trait of a nature full of a sweet strength of mind and heart:

> "A soul serene, Madonna-like, enshrined
> In her dear self."

The embers glowed with a soft and genial heat which seemed to make the exchange of confidences between us easy and natural. Even with those who stand nearest to us we can never force one of those interchanges of thought which mark the very best moments of our lives; they must grow out of the occasion and the mood, and they sometimes elude our most patient endeavours. In the story of "Faust" Goethe undoubtedly meant to say, among other things, that a man does not own his soul; he cannot barter it for any price, because it belongs to God. It is certain that the deeper self which we call the soul does not hold itself at our beck and call. There are hours when it is inaccessible, although we make strenuous effort to reach it; when it is dumb, although we urge it to speak. But at the moment when we least expect such happiness, it suddenly reveals itself to us, and to that other whose atmosphere, whose gift or grace or accent, has somehow won its confidence and inspired it with utterance. There have been moments like this in our history which seem to be, as we

look back, the real events in our lives — those events which have made us acquainted with our own natures, and held open the door of life at the same time. The glowing embers sent a warm thrill into our very hearts, and in that warmth our thoughts seemed to flow together. Then, for the first time, I understood the real sentiment of that residuum of fire and heat which the flame leaves behind it. The heart of the fire survives the perishing of the material which fed it; that has vanished, but its soul of heat and light remains, a beautiful afterglow. In some kindred sense friendship is the survival of the perishable element of the years that are gone; actions, experiences, words, are mostly forgotten, but the trust, faith, affection, that grew out of and through these remain to give light and warmth to the later time. The past that has burned out, like the flame of the earlier evening, survives in these glowing embers, radiating heat and light.

As the embers form the residuum of that which is gone, so do they make the surest foundation for future activity and

The glowing embers sent a warm thrill into our very hearts.

beauty. I have but to lay a few sticks across these coals, and immediately the blaze is kindled; there lies the compressed force of fire. There are hearths on which the glow never dies; it is kindled and rekindled day after day, until it becomes a continuous fire from season's end to season's end. Like the ancient hearth-fires from which the Greek emigrants carried embers when they parted from the overcrowded community, these fires light each new day and each succeeding month with something from the warmth and glow of the day and the month that are gone. Friendship carries into the future whatever was best and truest in our past relationships; whatever could be detached from the perishable forms in which our lives express and manifest themselves. Each year adds to the accumulations of the past, and levels still more these invisible walls which separate us. The solitude of life is known to us all; for the most part we are alone, and the voices of friends come only faint and broken across the impassable gulfs which surround every human soul. No one has felt the pathos of this solitude

more keenly or given it a more deeply poetic expression than Matthew Arnold:

"Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

"But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing;
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour —

"Oh! then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent!
Now round us spreads the watery plain —
Oh, might our marges meet again!

"Who order'd that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea."

The moods in which the sense of kinship outweighs the sense of isolation, when the balms of spring are in the air, and in the solitudes a divine music is heard, come oftenest at the bidding of the friend who has journeyed with us in the day of action, and bivouacked with us when the night of sorrow has fallen upon us, swift and awful, from the shining skies. There are those who were born to be our kinsmen of the soul, and whose voice reaches us when all other voices fail. "For the rest, which we commonly call friends and friendships," says the wise Montaigne, "are nothing but acquaintance and familiarities, either occasionally contracted or by some design, by means of which there happens some little intercourse betwixt our souls; but in the friendship I speak of, they mix and work themselves into one piece, with so universal a mixture that there is no more sign of the seam by which they were first conjoined. If a man should importune me to give a reason why I loved him, I find it could no otherwise be exprest than by making answer, because it was he, because it was I. There is beyond I am able to

say, I know not what inexplicable and fatal power that brought on this union."

As we say good-night we carefully cover the embers with ashes, which no longer signify desolation, but the husbanding of the fire for to-morrow's cheer and warmth. Friendship is always prophetic of the morrow; its past is prophecy and promise of the morrow.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DAY OUT OF DOORS

AS I sit looking into the study-fire my glance rests on a pair of snow-shoes on the broad chimney breast, and straightway fancy flies abroad and recalls a glorious day of winter cheer and exploit.

A writer of deep suggestiveness has commented on the superior advantages of the man on horseback over the man on foot; but this exalted condition, which in certain seasons gives one a delicious sense of sovereignty, affords neither advantage nor charm in the northern climate in mid-winter. The man to whom all things are possible under these circumstances is the man on snow-shoes. He alone holds the key of the snow-beleaguered forests; to him alone is intrusted the right of eminent domain — the privilege, in other words,

of seizing for his own use the lands of his neighbours; he alone owns the landscape. Great privileges never go save in company with grave responsibilities, and not unfrequently with serious perils. No one need expect, therefore, to be put into possession of the landscape except upon conditions more or less formidable. The snow-shoe is a delightful feature of decoration; how often have we seen it effectively displayed against a proper background, and straightway, as if a door had been set ajar into another clime, the breath of winter has been upon us, the splendour of illimitable fields of snow has blinded us, and we have seen in a glance the dark line of spruce and fire as it climbs the white peak against the deep blue horizon line. But the snow-shoe has its serious and even humiliating aspects. The novice who ties it on his moccasin and goes forth for the first time in rash and exulting confidence is likely to meet with swift and calamitous eclipse. He mounts the first inviting drift of beautiful snow, only to disappear in a humiliation and perplexity from which he emerges blinded, breathless, and whiter

A clear, cold winter's morning.

than the Polar bear. The unsympathetic jeers of his companions complete the discipline and stimulate to further catastrophes, which in the end work out the peaceful results of wisdom and training. But the secret once learned, snow-shoeing is thenceforth a measureless delight.

Thoreau declares that in one sense we cannot live too leisurely. "Let me not live as if time was short. Catch the pace of the seasons, have leisure to attend to every phenomenon of nature, and to entertain every thought that comes to you. Let your life be a leisurely progress through the volumes of nature . . ." To thoroughly enter into the life of nature one must accept her mood at the moment, and she has as many moods as the mortals who seek her companionship; but with all her moods she is never moody. On a summer's day the spacious leisure of the forest invites one to complete cessation of effort; to that profound repose which sets every door ajar for fresh perceptions and new influences. But on a clear, cold winter's morning a very different spirit is abroad; not repose, but intensity of action, is

solicited. There lies the great world, from which the traces of individual ownership have been almost obliterated; who will claim it, and enforce his claim with absolute possession? It is in response to this inspiring challenge that the man on snow-shoes enters the field. If he is made of the right stuff he has the air of a great proprietor. To him roads and fences and all artificial boundary lines are as if they were not; he owns the landscape, and there are moments when he feels as if the sky had been hung above his wide, free world to give him the last and most delicate sensation of adventure. The great joy of the man on snow-shoes is the consciousness of freedom. He is released from the tyranny of the roads and the impertinent intrusion of fences; places that were once forbidden or inaccessible are now open to him; fields given over to the selfishness of agriculture are leased to nature for the nobler uses of beauty and his personal adventure; there is no secluded pond in the woods to which he cannot choose his own path; there is no remote outlook across field or swamp to which he cannot

swiftly make his way. The great drifts, the long levels of snow in the open places, are so many exhilarating opportunities to him, and he accepts the invitation of nature to come abroad with her not as an inferior but as an equal.

The snow-shoe is ingeniously devised to diffuse man's ponderosity over a larger surface; to enable him to go by artifice where the natural construction of his body would forbid his going. This well devised aid to escape from civilisation sets free the mind at the same time that it removes a physical limitation. The man who cannot get away from himself on snow-shoes is a galley slave who deserves the oar and will never escape from it. But most men who find themselves afield so equipped cast off all bondage of mind to old habits and limitations by an effort so natural that it is purely unconscious. They are filled with an insatiable desire to take deep breaths, to penetrate every recess of the world about them, to overcome every obstacle and leave nothing untried. In the vigorous morning air all enterprises are open, and one waits neither to count the

hours nor the difficulties. The earth shines like the sky, and a kind of ineffable splendour crowns the day. Level field and rolling meadow, stretch of lowland and sweep of mountain, unbroken surface of lake and curving whiteness of river losing itself behind the hills — all these lie within the vision and invite exploration. The dark green masses of pine and spruce rest the eye dazzled by the universal brilliancy. The mountains have a marvellous delicacy and charm; instead of presenting a flat surface of dead white they reveal a thousand soft and rounded outlines; each tree is individualised and stands out in clear and perfect symmetry, and every branch and leaf is white with exquisite frost work. At sunset, when the last tender light of the winter day falls on those deep, rich masses of frost tracery, one will see a vanishing loveliness as tender as the flush of the rose leaf and as ethereal as the light of a solitary star when it first touches the edges of the hills. The day ends in Hesperian splendour.

But, fortunately, the day is still in its prime, and, as one chooses the deepest

drift and climbs to the top of the nearest hill, he wishes it might never end. Arrived at the summit, breathless and exultant, he looks for the hollow which has caught the drifts, and, after a moment's rest, he runs swiftly down to the pond below, sliding on the crusts, and moving more slowly and cautiously over light snow of whose depth and yielding quality he has perhaps already had sad experience. The level surface of the pond lacks that variety which is the charm of snow-shoeing, and so one skirts the shore and takes the first accessible opening into the woods; and now delight and danger are mixed in the most delicious compound. The remoteness, the silence, and the solitude of the winter woods are simply enchanting; the sky is softly blue between the "bare, ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang;" every twig is snow-bound, and the only evidence of life is the track of the rabbit or the fox. One tramps on, jubilant and self-forgetful, until suddenly some unseen root catches in the interstices of the snow-shoe, and then alas for human greatness! But the disaster is only momentary — is, indeed, part of the

novel and fascinating experience. On and on through the deep recesses of the forest one makes his way, and at every turn some lovely or impressive wintry scene frames itself for permanent hanging in the memory. Now it is a little snow-covered hollow where one is sure the mosses grow thick in summer; now it is a solitary tree whose tracery of branches is exquisitely etched against the sky; now it is a side hill swiftly descending to the narrow brook, the music of whose running still lingers softly cadenced in the ear of memory; now it is a sudden glimpse of the mountains that rise in the wide silence and solitude like primeval altars whose lofty fires are lighted at sunrise and sunset; and now, as one leaves the forest behind, the last picture is the river winding through the dark, wild mountain gorge, its waters rushing impatient and tumultuous over the ice that strives in vain to fetter them.

The short day is already hurrying to its close; but its brevity has no power over the memories one has plucked from wood and field. Reluctantly one hurries homeward. The smoke from the little village

in the hollow rises in straight white lines above every house, and as one pauses for a moment, before descending, to take in the picture, one recalls a similar moment of which Thoreau has preserved the fleeting impression: "The windows on the skirts of the village reflect the setting sun with intense brilliancy, a dazzling glitter, it is so cold. Standing thus on one side of the hill, I begin to see a pink light reflected from the snow about fifteen minutes before

the sun sets. This gradually deepens to purple and violet in some places, and the pink is very distinct, especially when, after looking at the simply white snow on other sides, you turn your eyes to the hill. Even after all direct sunlight is withdrawn from the hill-top, as well as from the valley in which you stand, you see, if you are prepared to discern it, a faint and delicate tinge of purple and violet there." But the vanishing beauty of this hour eludes even the pencil of Thoreau, and as you take off your snow-shoes you are aware that you have become the possessor of a day which you will always long to share with others, but the memory of which, in spite of all your efforts toward expression, will remain incommunicable.

CHAPTER XXVII

BESIDE THE ISIS

THERE is a wilful spirit in the study-fire which eludes all attempts to make it the servant of human moods and habits. It is gay and even boisterous on days when it ought to be melancholy, and it is despondent at times when it ought to be cheerful.

There is much that is akin to human thought in it, and there is much that is alien; for the wild, free life of the woods blazes and sings in its flames. Its glow rests now on one and now on another of the objects that lie within its magic circle; one day it seems to seek the poet's corner, and lingers with a kind of bright and merry tenderness about those rows of shining names; on other days it makes its home with the travellers, as if in fancy

mingling its softer radiance with the fiery brightness of the desert, or breaking a little the gloom of the arctic night. Sometimes it lies soft and warm on one of the two or three faces that hang on the study walls; on the old poet whose memory lends a deep and beautiful interest to one of the quaintest of Old World towns; or on the keen, pure face of one so modern and American that, although the cadence of the pine breaks the silence where he sleeps, he is still so far in advance of us that we cannot call ourselves his contemporaries. To-day it rests contentedly on a bit of landscape to which one's imagination goes out in these spring days as to one of those enchanting places which are its visible homes. It is a glimpse of the garden of New College at Oxford, with the beautiful Magdalen tower in the distance; the venerable trees, the stretch of velvety sward, the ivy-covered gate in the foreground. As the eye rests upon it memory fills in the imperfect picture; the bit of the old city wall hidden by the dense masses of ivy, the walk shadowed by ancient trees, the sculptured walls of the College — these

Beautiful Magdalen tower in the distance.

rise on the inward vision under the spell of this glimpse of the venerable town on the Isis. And with them comes that which no visible portraiture can represent; the Old World silence and peace, the ripe loveliness, the brooding presence of ancient memories! One feels here the deepest spell of that history which, although localised on an alien continent, is still the background of his own life; that history which lives in names as familiar as the names of those who stand nearest us, in thoughts that are our constant companions, in words whose music is never silent in our memory. Melancholy indeed must be the lot of one who could sit under these ancient trees in this ancient world, where nature and art conspired centuries ago to lay eye and imagination under a common spell, and not feel himself in some sense one of the heirs of this incomparable inheritance bequeathed by history, art, and scholarship to this busy, changing modern world. From the day, now more than five centuries past, when the princely generosity of that princely scholar and man, William of Wykeham, opened the

noble quadrangle of New College to "seventy scholars studying in the faculties," to this spring day, when the limes are green and the soft April skies spread over spire and tower, this place has been sacred to the "things of the mind."

To recall the names of the Oxford scholars, from Roger Bacon and Wyclif to Jowett and Pattison, is to revive the most splendid traditions of English learning, and to traverse step by step the great stages of the intellectual growth of the modern world: mediævalism, with its kindred scholasticism; the Renaissance, with its ardent teachers of the new learning; the Reformation, whose visible witness to liberty and conscience stands in St. Giles Street; the broad, rich movement of recent scholarship associated with a score of famous names. One may look through Mr. Hogg's eyes into Shelley's rooms in University College, where the slight, shy poet carries on his chemical experiments, or watch him when on Magdalen Bridge he abruptly snatches a baby from its mother's arms to interrogate it concerning pre-existence; or take note of Addison

meditating under the elms by the Cherwell; or of Johnson in his poor chamber in Pembroke Gate tower; or study the faces of Wolsey and Gladstone as they hang in the hall of Christ Church; or strive to recall, in the week-day solitude of St. Mary's, the spell of those sermons spoken sixty years ago from its pulpit by one of the masters of English speech, who has been also a master of the things of the spirit. One may find all shrines of ancient worship and consult all spirits of ancient wisdom in this beautiful city, "so venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene!" Well might the poet and scholar who loved her and honoured her with his own delicate genius, his own manly independence, add: "And yet, steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age, who will deny that Oxford, by her ineffable charm keeps ever calling us nearer to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection — to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side?"

There are glimpses everywhere which lure one away from this lovely garden of New College; in every quadrangle there are associations with great names. But if one is in a meditative mood, he will be loath to exchange the silence of this venerable garden for the magnificence of the Christ Church quadrangles or for the noble vista of High Street, which Hawthorne long ago pronounced the most impressive street in England. The spell of Oxford is in the air, and one comes under it most entirely when he loiters in one of these ancient fastnesses of the beautiful English verdure. As one waits on the genius of the place, one recalls the words of the pure and noble scholar whose life and thought had been an education to his country. No modern man has valued scholarship more intelligently and justly than Emerson. His life was given to its pursuits, and his work, singularly free from the intrusion of the processes and terminology of scholarship, is ripe with its wisdom and weighty in expression of its large results. "A scholar," said Emerson, "is the favourite of heaven and earth, the ex-

cellency of his country, the happiest of men. His duties lead him directly into the holy ground where other men's aspirations only point. His successes are occasions of the purest joy to all men." Never were truer words written; the world does not reward its scholars as it rewards those who achieve more practical or more striking and picturesque successes, but in its heart it honours them and recognises, by instinct if not by intelligence, that they are the ministers of its noblest interests. Those only who have had a share, however small, in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake know how engrossing the pursuit is, and how all other forms of activity lose interest in comparison with it. There is for all such minds an irresistible fascination in the scholar's work; a spell which makes the years one long preoccupation, and life an intense and insatiable hunger for more light and truth. The pedant deals with the husks of things, but the scholar deals with the great realities which are disclosed and expressed in the vast range of human knowledge. He lives continually in the great moments and with

the great minds; he escapes the limitations of the passing hour into the great past or into the larger movement of his own time. The noblest works of the noblest men are his habitual companions, and he looks upon life with eyes which distinguish its main currents from its conflicting and momentary eddies.

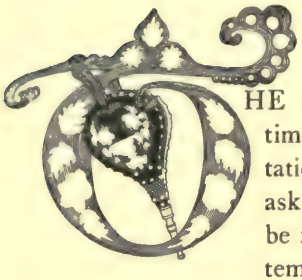
Here, within these ivy-clad walls, with this vision of mediæval towers and turrets and spires, embosomed in a quiet in which great voices seem to be hushed, one believes with Emerson that the scholar is the most fortunate of men. One recalls the ripe and fruitful seekers after truth who have lived and died in these peaceful retreats; pacing year after year these shaded walks, working in the libraries, meditating by the mullioned windows with all the magical beauty of Oxford spread out before them. Was it not Hawthorne who wished that he had one life to spend entirely in Oxford? In this enchanting "home of lost causes and impossible loyalties" one could easily imagine himself becalmed forever; always meaning to break the charm and return to the turbulent

world not two hours away, and yet always postponing the final parting to a morrow which never comes.

From the reverie into which the firelight on the bit of landscape has lured me insensibly, I awake to find the fire dying and the sky splendid with the midnight stars. The towers of Oxford have become once more a memory, but that which gives them their most enduring charm may be here as well as there; for here no less than beside the Isis one may love scholarship and pursue it, one may hold to the things of the mind against all the temptations of materialism, one may live his own life of thought.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A WORD FOR IDLENESS



HE study fire is sometimes so potent a solicitation to reverie that I ask myself whether it be not a subtle kind of temptation. Even when a man has cleared himself of the cant of the day, as Carlyle would put it, and delivered himself of the American illusion that every hour not devoted to "doing something" is an hour wasted, the inherited instinct is still strong enough to make a faint appeal to conscience. Those active, aggressive words, "doing" and "getting," have so long usurped the greater part of the space in our vocabulary that we use the words "being" and "growing" with a little uncertainty; most of us are not entirely at ease with them yet. One of the highest uses of literature is the aid

it gives us in securing something like harmony of life — a just balance between the faculties which are developed by practical affairs and those which need the ampler air of intellectual movement. Literature is the mute but eloquent witness forever testifying to the reality and power of ideas and ideals. Every great poem is a revelation of that invisible world of beauty in which all may claim citizenship, but in which those alone abide who are rich in their own natures; a world in which no activity is valued by the stir it makes, and no achievement measured by the noise which accompanies it.

When I recall these things, I perceive that the study fire is helping me to be true to myself when it gently lures me on to reverie and meditation. There is a vast difference between being busy and being fruitful. Busy people are often painfully barren and uninteresting. Their activity expends itself in small mechanical ways which add nothing to the sum of human knowledge or happiness. On the other hand, people who are apparently idle, who seem to be detached from the working

world, are often the most fruitful. Our standards of work and idleness are in sad need of revision — a revision which shall substitute character for mere activity, and measure worth and achievement by the depth and richness of nature disclosed. The prior of the Carmelite convent at Frankfort described Giordano Bruno as a man always "walking up and down, filled with fantastic meditations upon new things." In the judgment of the busy people of his time, Bruno, although by no means devoid of energy, was probably accounted an idler. His occupations were different from theirs, and therefore, of course, to be condemned; "so runs the world away." But time, which has corrected so many inadequate judgments, has overruled the decision of Bruno's critics; they have ceased with their works, but those "fantastic meditations" have somehow sustained their interest, and there now stands on the Campo de' Fiori at Rome a statue of the scholar whose walking up and down attracted the attention of the Carmelite prior three centuries ago and more. In these apparently inactive hours of

meditation great thoughts rise out of the silent deep over which a man broods inactive and absorbed.

Balzac was a prodigious worker. Measured by the standard he set, the real toil of most people who account themselves busy shrinks to very small dimensions. A kind of demoniac energy seized the great novelist when a new work lay clear in his mind, drove him off the boulevard,

locked him in his working room, and held him there in almost solitary confinement until the novel was written, and the novelist emerged worn, exhausted, and reduced to a shadow of his former self. This anguish of toil — for work so intense and continuous is nothing less than anguish — was prolonged through years, and the fruit of it fills several shelves in our book-cases; and yet the highest work which Balzac did was not done in those solitary and painful days when the fever of composition was on him; it was done in the long, apparently idle hours which he spent on the boulevards, and at the cafés. In those hours his keen and powerful mind was receiving impressions, collecting facts, observing men, drinking in the vast movement of life which went on about him and in which every social condition, every phase of character, every process of moral advance or decay, was revealed. These meditative hours, in which the hands were idle that the mind might have freest range and the imagination uninterrupted play, were the creative periods; in them great works were planned, developed, shaped.

They were the real working hours of the novelist, who displayed on an immense canvas the France of his day.

One can imagine as he studies the face of Shakespeare or of Goethe, charged with the very spirit of meditation, what long and inspiring hours of thought, of deep brooding upon the mystery of the soul, lay behind the works of these masters of man and his life. Out of this profound silence, in which the soul opened itself, hushed and reverential, to the lessons of time and eternity, the great works grew as the tree and the flower spring out of the hidden places of the soil. Men of affluent nature, to whom thought brings its solemn revelations, and on the unseen horizon of whose souls the light of the imagination glows like sunrise on new and undiscovered

worlds, live in this mood of meditation — the mother of all the glorious works of art and literature which inspire and sustain us. These hours in which no activity breaks the current of thought are the creative periods; hours solemn with that kinship with Deity which comes when the eye discerns the path of the divine thought, or sees with prophetic vision the image of that beauty with which all created things are suffused. The deepest life is as silent as the soil out of which the glory of summer bursts; all noble activities issue from it, and no great work is ever done save by those who have lived in the repose which precedes creation.

CHAPTER XXIX

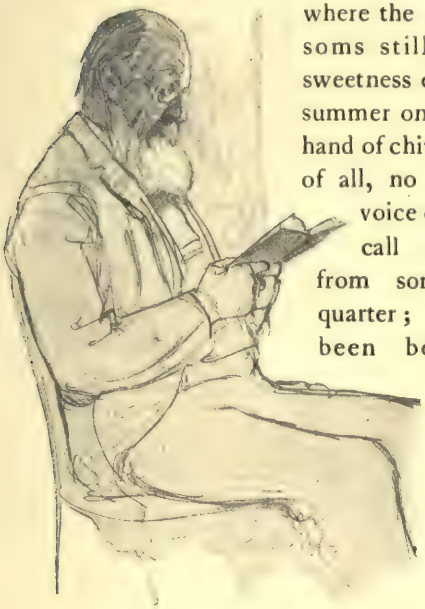
"THE BLISS OF SOLITUDE"

HEN I looked out of the study window this morning, and saw the wide stretch of country to the distant hills covered with drifting snow, which a fierce and wilful wind carried hither and thither in whirling clouds like vagrant wraiths, I knew what Emerson meant when he wrote that fine line about the "tumultuous privacy of storm." Wind and snow bar all the gates to-day with invisible bolts; the village is as remote and detached as if it were on another continent. Across all the avenues of communication is written "no thoroughfare;" the road through the woods will remain for hours without a disturbing wheel, and with no traveller save the shy wild dwellers of the place,

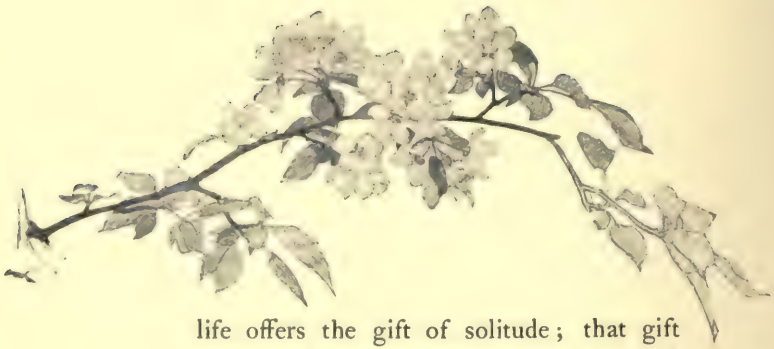
glad of this sudden barricade against human intrusion. On the hearth, as if answering the shouts of the riotous wind down the chimney, the fire burns with unwonted cheeriness.

On such a morning, when nature takes matters in her own hands and locks the doors of ingress and egress without so much as saying "by your leave," one settles down to a day of meditation and reading with peculiar and unqualified satisfaction. No hand will let the knocker fall, with resounding clangour, at the very moment when you have completely lost yourself in some beautiful country of the

soul — some distant island where Prospero still holds his unburied rod and reads in his unsunken books; some valley of Avalon, where the apple blossoms still rain the sweetness of perennial summer on the mailed hand of chivalry. Best of all, no disquieting voice of duty will call persistently from some remote quarter; you have been bolted and



barred against the intrusion even of your conscience. So lodged, one may give himself up to the solitude of the day without any other feeling than that of repose and delight. Happy is he to whom



life offers the gift of solitude; that gift which makes so many other gifts available! Happy is he to whom with books and the love of meditation there is also given the repose, the quiet, the isolation which are the very breath of the life of thought! We are swift to praise heroism and self-denial when these take on striking forms and appeal to the eye or the imagination; but how infrequent is our recognition of that noble resignation which takes the form of quiet acceptance of limitations which separate one from the work of his heart and divide him from the joy of his life!

Happy are they, however, to whom solitude brings its deep and satisfying joy — the joy of fellowship with great souls, of companionship with nature in that sub-

lime communion which Aubrey De Vere describes as "one long mystic colloquy between the twin-born powers, whispering together of immortality;" of quiet brooding over one's thought; of the rapture of the imagination detaching itself from the world of habit and work, and breathing the ampler ether of the great Idealisms. Nothing redeems a life from the barrenness of continued activity so completely as a stream of deep, silent meditation running under all one's work, and rising into light when the day of solitude comes round. It has been said of Shakespeare that his face bears the marks of habitual meditation; there is visible in it the calmness and fulness of a mind forever brooding over the deep things of life; steadied by contemplation of the unfathomable gulfs beneath, uplifted by vision of the shining heights above, calmed and held in poise by familiarity with the unmeasured forces which play about us.

There is no shirking of common duties, no self-indulgence, in this separation from our fellows. The Irishman who defined solitude as "being alone with one's sweet-

heart" was not so far out of the way as he seems at the first blush. For the solitude that is a necessity to thoughtful natures is not isolation; it is separation from the stress and turmoil of the world. Wordsworth's life at Grasmere was a life of solitude, but not a solitary life; on the contrary, it was enriched and ministered to by the most intimate and devoted companionship. That companionship did not introduce new and contradictory influences into the poet's life; it brought no pressure of other and diverse aims and ideals to bear on his work. It confirmed and inspired him by constant and pervading sympathy. His days were spent in solitude, without solitariness or isolation; the atmosphere of his fireside was not different from that which reigned among the hills in those long hours when the poet paced to and fro along his garden paths, chanting his own lines in low monotone.

There is nothing more delightful about the study fire than the sense of congenial solitude which it conveys — the solitude of quiet, reposeful hours, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." The world

must be with us, but not too much with us, if we would gain that calm, complete mastery of ourselves which marks full intellectual stature. No large-minded man reviles the world; he knows its uses and value too well for that; it is the cramped, narrow, or morbid natures who seek complete isolation, and in the little circle of their own individualism find that satisfaction which comes to men of larger mould only from free and inspiring contact with the whole order of things of which they are part. It is not rejection of society, but wise and right use of it, which characterises the man who lives most richly in the things of the mind. One finds in solitude only that which he takes into it; it gives nothing save the conditions most favourable to growth. The quiet hours before one's fire, with one's books at hand; the long ramble along the woodland road — these make one free to brood over the thoughts that come unbidden, to follow them step by step to their unseen goals, and to drink in the subtle and invisible influences of the hour when one gives one's self up to it. There is nothing in

all the rich and deep experience of life so full of quiet joy, so freighted with the revelations of the things we seek with completest sincerity, as these pauses of solitude in the ceaseless stir and movement of the world.

CHAPTER XXX

THE MYSTERY OF ATMOSPHERE

OT many months ago an artist described a striking change in a landscape. It was a dull afternoon in September, and the stretch of sand dune, with its stunted trees and scattered bits of herbage, was gray as the sky and the sea. The narrow channel of a little estuary that ran back among the low hills was empty and bare. Two hours passed, and the busy sketcher looked up suddenly from her work to find the silent world alive once more. The tide was coming in, and the sea was sending a current out of its own fathomless life into the heart of the land. Up the narrow channel ran the eager, restless rivulet, widening, rippling, full of vitality, movement, and

colour, and changing on the instant the gray of sky and landscape into a warmer tone. A pulsation from the sea had transformed the landscape.

On dark days or lifeless days the lighting of the fire works a kindred miracle in the study; it fills the room with life, colour, change. The four walls are unchanged; the books look down in the old order from the shelves; the table overflows as of old with magazines and reviews; it is the same room, and yet it is not the same, for it is pervaded by a different atmosphere.

Nothing is more elusive than this intangible thing we call atmosphere, but nothing holds more of the magic of beauty and of the charm of life. It is, indeed, a very subtle and pervasive form of life; the form which finds its delicate and fadeless record in art. Those transparent dawns which the lover of Corot knows so well are but marvellous impressions of atmosphere; the wonder is not in earth or sky, it is in the fusion of light and air. There is no bit of nature that a man loves which has not this spell for him; rocks, trees,

There is no symbol of permanency so impressive as a mountain range.

and running stream remain to-day as they were yesterday, but they are changed, for a different atmosphere enfolds them. There is no symbol of permanency on this perishing earth of ours so impressive as a mountain range; but there is no created thing so full of the mystery of change. Distance, height, mass, and relation are never the same two hours together. On some mornings the hills are remote, inaccessible, immobile, of unbroken surface; but when the afternoon comes, behold! they are near, soft of tone, with outlines that seem almost fluid in their mobility, and with great fissures, full of golden light, opening their very heart to the day.

This atmospheric quality finds its source in the imagination, and, resting on the bare, unchanging facts of life, transforms and irradiates them. To the fisherman, intent on his task or weary of the endless strife with storm and calm, the seas about Iceland are dreary enough; but to Pierre Loti, with his sensitive, impressionable imagination, what miracles of light and colour are wrought on those far-off wastes of ocean! So delicately and with such

command of the subtlest effects of words are those changes registered, from clear skies stainless above blue seas to nights of fathomless blackness swept by polar bitterness of storm, that the landscape loses for us its fixed and changeless elements and becomes a flowing stream of force touched every moment with shifting and enchanting beauty.

Shakespeare knew all the secrets of atmosphere, and, by reason of them, penetrates the very sources of the life with which he deals, and makes us sharers with himself in this final and complete possession. Other poets could have reproduced more accurately and with harder fidelity to bare fact the fixed conditions of Roman life under the first Cæsar, and of life on the Nile in the day of the greatest siren who has ever sung men into forgetfulness of duty and indifference to empire; but no one has touched those conditions with such semblance of reality, put into those streets such moving figures, into those dead and buried men and women such characteristic and individual force and charm, and into that faded past such glowing colour, such

moving splendour, such varied and interwoven charm. Brutus yielding to the noble importunity of Portia for confidence, and Marc Antony melting in purpose and energy at the glance of those languorous eyes and the sound of that full-throated, passionate voice — is there anywhere a contrast so fundamental, because so compounded of the invisible elements which belong, not to the fixed and stationary, but to the free and flowing side of life ?

And the spell of this atmospheric quality lies in its spontaneity and unconsciousness. It steals into our thought and conveys a lasting impression while we take no note of its presence. Statements of facts, conclusions, descriptions, we can deal with critically, because they are, in a way, concrete and tangible ; but the colours in which these are dyed, the feeling which pervades them, the nameless, elusive quality which conforms them to the idea they embody or the character they express, find us unprotected and defenceless. Unless we resolutely close the eye, the landscape instantly records itself on the mind ; and unless we deliberately shut the imagination,

the artist works his spell within us. The fresh and penetrating charm of the early summer is not more pervasive and impossible to escape than is this intangible quality in a work of art.

To the artist himself it is not less mysterious; it is part of his personality, and he cannot lay hand upon it. In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the "Eve of St. Agnes" Keats was dealing with material as different in substance, colour, and form as the classical and the mediæval ideals and manner of life. Of that difference he was no doubt perfectly conscious, and he makes us realise it in a definite and distinct difference of diction, feeling, and treatment; but there is a difference of atmosphere between the two poems of which the poet cannot have been conscious at the moment of production. There was in him an unconscious adjustment of mind, an unconscious response of the imagination to the appeal of two aspects of life, separated not only by an abyss of time, but by a still deeper abyss of experience. That response is a vital act; it is the activity of that deeper self whose secret is unrevealed;

it is creative, and therefore baffling and inexplicable. The rocks, fields, trees, and hills may be set down accurately on the map; but no man can make record of the atmosphere which to-day touches them with beauty beyond the skill of art, and to-morrow leaves them cold, detached, and lifeless as the matter of which they are compounded. Students and critics have not failed to point out Shakespeare's methods of dealing with history and character, but no lover of the great dramatist has ever discovered the secret of that power by which he gives to our imagination the rude massiveness of the age of Lear, the fresh, varied, and vital charm of the Forest of Arden, and the colour, the languor, and the voluptuous spell of Egypt upon Antony and Enobarbus.

CHAPTER XXXI

A NEW HEARTH

IN most men there is a native conservatism; even those who are progressive and radical in their view of things in general are stanch defenders of old habits and familiar places. The man who has his doubts about absolute private ownership will hesitate long before cutting down some old-time tree whose beauty decay is fast changing into ugliness, or giving up the inconvenient and narrow home of childhood for more ample and attractive quarters. We cling to old things by instinct, and because they have been a part of our lives. When Rosalind and myself began talking about a new and ampler hearth for the study fire, the prospect, although alluring, was not without its shadows. There was not only the consciousness of the sur-

render of delightful associations, but the thought of the newness to be made old and the coldness to be made warm. A fresh hearth has no sentiment until the fire has roared up the wide-throated chimney on windy nights, no associations until its glow has fallen on a circle of familiar faces.

But how soon the strange becomes familiar, and that which was detached from all human fellowship takes on the deeper interest and profounder meaning of human life! Rosalind had barely lighted the fire on the new hearth before the room seemed familiar and homelike. The bit of drift-wood which the children laid on at a later stage was really needed to give a suggestion of something strange and foreign to our daily habit. There is a wonderful power in us of imparting ourselves to our surroundings; the fountain of vitality constantly overflows and fertilises everything we touch. We give ourselves to the rooms in which we live and the tools with which we work. It is not only the pen with which the great man wrote and the toy with which the little child played that

gain a kind of sacredness in our eyes; it is almost every object that has had human use. The infinite pains which Balzac put into the description of the belongings of his chief characters give evidence of that virile genius which caught not only the direct ray of character, but gathered up also its myriad reflections in the things it used. Life is always the most precious of our possessions, and it is because inanimate things often hold so much of it that they come to have a kind of sanctity for us.

If the deeper history of our race were written, would not one half of it record the attachments which men have formed for visible and invisible things — for homes and churches and countries, for institutions and beliefs and ideals — and the other half record the struggles and the agony with which men have detached themselves from the things they have loved? To humanise by use and by love, and then to forsake as the trees drop their leaves in autumn — is not this the human story and the human destiny? There is a noble side to it, and a very painful side. I can readily understand the half-pathetic

We give ourselves to the rooms in which we live and the tools with which we work

G. COWLES

note of those who recall the past with a poignant sense of loss; to whom the great inspirations have remained in the beliefs and the ideals of youth, and whose later journey has been one ever-widening separation from the dear familiar things of long ago. The men in the early part of the century, who had read Addison and Dryden and Pope in childhood, could not be expected to discern at once the genius of Wordsworth, or to hear at first the ethereal strain of Shelley; as to-day many who were nourished on Wordsworth and Byron and Keats are unresponsive to Browning or Rossetti; and now that the massive harmonies of the German composers are filling the opera-houses, there are many who openly or in secret are longing for those brilliant Italian melodies which once captivated the world. The past must be dear to us, since it was once part of us, and when we recall its story we turn the pages of our own biography. The old hearthstone can never be other than sacred, since the light of it was on faces that we loved, and the song of it was often our own thought set to the cheerful

music which the logs sing when the living woods are silent.

But shall there be no new hearth because the old hearth has so often warmed and comforted us; no new song because the old songs set our youth to their thrilling music? The charm of the past always remains; we do not surrender it when we accept the new truth and listen to the new melody; we are not disloyal to it when we live deeply and resolutely in the age which gives us birth. For myself, a radical of radicals in the faith that the better things are always in the future, that truth has always fresh voices to speak for it, and art new inspirations to lend it new beauty, I believe that the only way to understand the past is to accept and live in the present. The true Wordsworthian is he who discriminates the great and genuine work of the poet from that which bears his name but not his genius — not he who insists that all the lines have equal inspiration. The true lover of Browning is not he who affirms the infallibility of the poet, but he who takes account of the ebb and flow of the poet's inspiration. The

true lover of the things that have been done and the men who did them is not he who lives in the past and lacks, therefore, a just perspective ; but he who lives in his own time, loyal to its duties and open to its visions, and who sees the past as one looks upon a landscape from an elevation which brings all its landmarks and boundaries into clear view. Let the fire blaze on the new hearth and sing lustily in the throat of the new chimney ; its light still falls on the old books and gilds the familiar titles ! We cannot reject the past if we would ; it is part of us, and it travels with us wherever we go. Not by reproducing its forms, but by discerning its spirit, do we really honour it. It is an illusion that the past was fixed and permanent, and that we are in the seething flood. The past was never less mobile than the present ; it was always changing, and that which seems fixed and stable to us is the form — the only part that is dead. Read deeply any of the old books, and you will hear the roar of the rushing river in them as distinctly as you hear it in Hugo or Ibsen or Tennyson. Beneath the great tragedies

to which the Greeks listened what a vast movement of the deeps of human thought and feeling! Beneath the "Divine Comedy" what a whirl of rushing tides! Beneath Marlowe and Shakespeare what tumult of the great seas! Genius means always and everywhere change and movement; never yet has it lacked the vision which made the future dear to it. When that vision ceases to inspire the artist's thought and hand, genius will take its flight. For the deepest and most inspiring truth in which we live is the truth that life is change and growth, not fixity of form and finality of development. Things move, not because they are unstable, but because a divine impulse impels them forward; the stars travel, not because they are wanderers in the skies, but because they are the servants of a sublime order. There are no fixed and permanent social conditions, because society is slowly moving toward a nobler ordering of its duties and its rights; there are no final books, because the human spirit, of which the greatest books are but imperfect expressions, is always passing through manifold experiences into

larger knowledge of itself and of the world about it; there are no final forms of art, because truth has always new beauty to reveal and beauty new truth to illustrate. Let the fire on the new hearth sing its lusty song of the summers that are past; its music has no note of forgetfulness; memory and prophecy are the burden of its song.

CHAPTER XXXII

AN IDYL OF WANDERING

IN these spring days all manner of alluring invitations find their way into my study and by the suggestions which they bring with them make its walls narrow and dingy in spite of the glow which pleasant associations have cast upon them. When I sit at my writing table in the morning and carefully arrange the unwritten sheets which are to receive the work of the day, a playful breeze comes in at the window and wilfully scatters the spotless pages about the room as if to protest against work and seclusion in these radiant days when the heavens rain sweet influences and the earth gives back its bloom and fragrance. I think then of all manner of places where the earliest and tenderest beauty of summer abides; the imagination

Like a child let loose from city squares, runs through meadows white with daisies.

revolts against work and, like a child let loose from city squares, runs through meadows white with daisies and into bosky hollows where the ferns breathe out a delicious coolness. I cannot resist the impulse which nature yearly renews in this golden hour of her beauty, and so I sally forth to such refreshment and adventure as one may look for in the hey-day of spring-time.

Yesterday I waved my handkerchief with the throng who crowded the pier and sent their huzzas after the great steamer swinging slowly into the stream, bound for that old world of history and imagination which has such hold upon the most American of us all. I followed the little group whom my affection separated from the throng on the deck until I could distinguish their faces no more; and then, when sight failed, thought travelled fast upon their foaming wake, and travels with them still. I know what days of calm

and nights of splendour, when the stars hang luminous over the silent world of waters, will be theirs; I know with what eager gaze they will scan the low horizon line when the first indistinct outlines of another continent break its perfect symmetry; I hear with them the first confused murmur of that rich old-world life; I follow them through historic street to historic church and palace; I see the blossoming hedges and mark the low ripple of quiet rivers flowing seaward, the murmur of whose movement lends its music to so much English poetry; I catch a sudden glimpse of cloud-like peaks breaking the inaccessible solitude of the sky, and in a moment the whole landscape of that rich world sweeps into sight and invites me to join them in their wanderings.

This season stirs one knows not what ancient instinct still in the very blood of our race, answering the first voices of the birds returning from their long journey, and the first outburst of life flowing back in the flood tide of advancing summer. The history of civilisation is an Odyssey of wandering. From the hour when

Abraham gathered his flocks and crossed the Euphrates, and those first Aryan ancestors of ours set out on their sublime emigration westward, to this day, when the axe of the pioneer rings through the California pine forests, and the camp-fire of the explorer rises beside the Congo, men have never ceased to travel hither and thither driven by a divine impulse to redeem and replenish the earth. In the long course of centuries the tent of the Arab is as permanent as the rock-built temple, and looking over history all races become nomadic. No race accepts its environment as permanent and final; there is always somewhere beyond the horizon of its present condition an undiscovered Atlantis, an untrodden Isle of the Blessed, where life will beat with stronger pulse, and smite into the obstacles that surround it the impress of a higher destiny. As the thought of a great new world sent Columbus wandering from court to court, so the intuition of some larger and grander life impels men continually from continent to continent; not restlessness, but aspiration, fills the sails and turns the prow seaward

forever and forever. The impulse which would not suffer Ulysses, old and travel-worn, to sit at ease stirs in the blood of the most modern of us all; our hearts beat to the music of his last appeal, spoken through one of the greatest of our modern poets:

"'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and, sitting well in order, smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die."

Those to whom the impulse to wander comes in vain are not without their consolations; the most adventurous explorers have dared and won for them, the most accomplished and keen-eyed travellers have not forgotten them. When these fancies invade my study and invite to journeys I cannot take, I turn to the well-filled shelves, where my books of travel stand shoulder to shoulder and hold out a world which I need only cross the room to possess. Sometimes a rose penetrates my seclusion, and brings me visions of that far East from which it drew the first breath of its fragrant life. Then I find

myself unconsciously putting out a hand for the well-worn books between whose covers Oriental colour and romance are hidden. I have long left behind the mood in which I read Lamartine with eager zest, but there are days when I still find the old glamour resting on the pages of the "Souvenirs d'Orient," and my imagination kindles again under the spell of that fervid style. The East stands in our thought of to-day for the old age of the race; but it was in the East that life began; and that buried childhood comes back to us with all the splendour of the earlier imagination. I hear once more the "sighing sakia" in Curtis's "Nile Notes," or draw rein on the great field of Esdraelon, flashing with the white blossoms of the Syrian spring-time; I cross the desert with "Eöthen," and meet the dreaded plague at the gates of Cairo.

But the prince of travellers is the superb Gautier, whose rich physical temperament stood related to the Eastern civilisation so vitally that it almost made him, what he sometimes claimed to be, a veritable Oriental. The colour and glow of Eastern

life were in his mind before he sought them in Algiers and at Constantinople; sensuous, full of delicate physical perceptions of the rich and varied forms of Oriental living, Gautier used all the resources of his marvellous style to reproduce the fading splendour which still remains among the older races. But Gautier, with his leonine face and Eastern temperament, had the sensitive imagination of a true traveller; he reflected his environment with a fidelity which brought out not only its reality but its ideal also. In the "Voyage en Russie" and the "Voyage en Espagne," no less than in his pictures of Algerian and Turkish life, we breathe the very atmosphere which surrounds him, and are conscious of a thousand delicate gradations of colour and manner which would have escaped an eye less keen, an imagination less plastic.

D'Amicis is less brilliant, less fertile, less subtly and marvellously endowed with mastery of the resources of speech; but he has sharp insight, broad sympathies, a fine faculty of reproducing local colouring. His "Holland" is a classic of travel.

From those marvellous "Voyages" of Richard Hakluyt to the charming books into which Charles Dudley Warner has put his impressions of foreign lands and peoples, the literature of travel has been one of increasing richness and fascination; but as I look over these goodly volumes, I recognise their kinship with the graver works of history that stand in solemn rows not far distant. The lighter volumes are records of personal wanderings; the graver ones are records of those mysterious wanderings of races in which history began, and which it will always continue to report. In this latest century we have seen a transference of races far more romantic and impressive than that wonderful "Flight of a Tartar Tribe," whose story De Quincey tells with such dramatic skill. The ancient instincts still survive beneath the culture of civilisation, and ever and anon we are moved into strange, vagrant moods by their reappearance in consciousness. It is the shallower part of life, after all, that finds expression. Arts, literatures, civilisation, are the few drops flung into the air from the running stream, and made iridescent by

the passing flash of the sunlight; the vast current of thought, emotion, experience, flows on in darkness and silence. Like the tropical tree, civilisation must support each expansion by sending down a new trunk to that ancient earth which cradled our infancy and from whom we can never be long separated. In the midst of our highest refinements, and under the influence of our ripest culture, there comes to each of us that mood which Mr. Lang has so admirably expressed in his noble sonnet on "The Odyssey":

"As one that for a weary space has lain
Lulled by the song of Circe and her wine
In gardens near the pale of Proserpine,
Where that Ææan isle forgets the main,
And only the low lutes of love complain,
And only shadows of wan lovers pine,
As such an one were glad to know the brine
Salt on his lips, and the large air again —
So gladly, from the songs of modern speech
Men turn, and see the stars, and feel the free
Shrill wind beyond the close of heavy flowers,
And through the music of the languid hours
They hear like ocean on a western beach
The surge and thunder of the Odyssey."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE OPEN WINDOW

HAVE noticed that at the close of a long winter the opening of the windows makes my books look faded and dusty. Yesterday, with the bright firelight playing upon them, they were fresh and even brilliant; to-day, with the soft blue sky shining through the window, they are old and shabby. This singular transformation has taken place more than once in my experience, and as in each instance the spell has been wrought on the same books, I am forced to believe that the change is in me and not in my familiar volumes. In winter I find them opulent in life and warmth; I feel in them the throb of the world's heart-beat; but when spring comes and the warm airs are full of invitation to the senses and the imagination, they be-

come suddenly meagre, artificial, and commonplace. They shrink from the strong sunlight, and in the affluent splendour of the summer they are the pale ghosts of their former selves.

The world of books is at best a world of shadows; one turns from it at times to drink anew and with unspeakable delight at the inexhaustible fountains of life. Commentaries are admirable in their place, but no true scholar ever permits them to stand long between his thought and the text; they help him in obscure passages, they light up dark and difficult sentences, but they are only aids; the text itself is always his supreme and final object. The man who goes to books instead of life, who gets his knowledge of humanity out of Shakespeare and of nature out of Wordsworth, will never know either profoundly. The Alps are more majestic than the noblest picture of them which artist ever put upon canvas, and men and women in the multiform relations of life more wonderful than any portraiture by the greatest dramatist. It is this mistake of taking the commentary for the text which makes most literary

men the slaves of art instead of the masters of life and its lessons; which fills their work with musical echoes and robs it of that mighty and commanding utterance which truth learned at first hand always finds for itself.

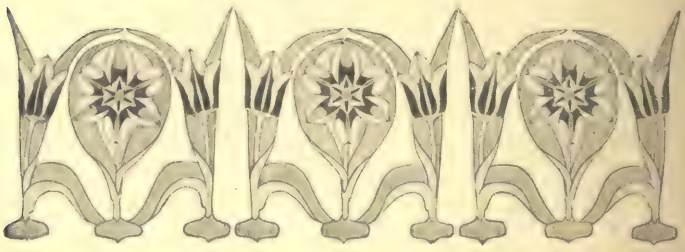
The library is at once a storehouse of treasures and a prison; its value depends entirely upon its use. If one's thought is hourly and patiently traversing the highways of human life, if one's heart penetrates with deep and abiding sympathy the small and the great experiences of men and women, one may use books and find nothing but light and power in them; they will discover relations which have escaped observation; they will bring within the horizon of thought vast and fertile tracts through which one has never been able to journey; they will suggest answers and solutions which will aid immeasurably in the comprehension of the great mysterious fact of life. But if one goes to books for fundamental conceptions, for that experience which one never really gets unless he acquires it at first hand, for those large, controlling views of things which ought

to be the creation of one's individual struggle with problems and difficulties and mysteries, they will prove inadequate and misleading teachers. No art can conceal or preserve that which has been borrowed from another; such second-hand creation often charms by its skill for a time, but its lack of vitality sooner or later makes it appear the barren, useless thing it is. No skill will save the picture which lacks the touch of nature, no art will give immortality to the book in which the pulse of life has never throbbed.

To-day the generous warmth of the sun has tempted me out of my study and beguiled me into hours of aimless wandering. I have seen the great expanse of water between the arching elms, and have noted, with a kind of exultation, that the trees are no longer leafless; the exquisite tracery of bare twig and branch is not so sharp of outline as when I saw it a week ago; a delicate colour suffuses itself over all, and blurs the edges that were sharp against the sky. A robin flashes across the stone wall, and yonder a medley of notes, dissonant with anger, betrays the

recurrence of those annual quarrels which settle the question of possession in more than one tree-top. A soft mist has touched the woods at the water's edge, and woven a prophetic charm over them; I find myself already weeks in advance of the season, for I seem to see even now the banners of summer afloat there, and to hear the inarticulate murmur of the forest weighty with the secrets of forgotten centuries. It is a new heaven which bends so benignantly over me, and a new earth which stirs with unconscious life about me. A tide of creative energy surges through all things, and reinspires my faith in the coming of a clearer and yet clearer revelation of the divine mystery. In each recurring spring some sensitive soul has stood where I stand, and felt this subtle harmony with the new world bursting into leaf and flower about him, and, nearer akin to nature than I, has overheard some whisper of tree to tree, or bird to bird, or star to star. Straightway a new line has found its way into the world's anthology, a new song has found words for itself in the vocabulary of human speech, and finally, a

new book gets into my study. But, at the best, it is only a faded reflection of that luminous sky which glows from this latest page, only a faint and confused murmur of that forest which I hear under the spell of this latest interpreter. The miracle remains incommunicable; no book will ever explain it to me; it must be wrought in and upon me.



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Mabie, Hamilton Wright
My study fire

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